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WEDLOCK

by

Jacob Wassermann

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WEDLOCK

PART I

I

The young man had called for the second time that evening. He requested the maid to give his card to Frau Laudin, and to ask her whether he might wait for the doctor. The card was not a very clean one; the words printed on it were: Konrad Lanz, Student of Chemistry.

Pia Laudin was just crossing the hall. She threw a casual glance at the card, and an equally casual one at the poorly-dressed man of about twenty-four who stood before her in his muddy boots and wet trousers and raincoat.

"My husband will probably be late," she said, and added, with a shade of distrust, "Do you wish to consult him in his professional capacity?"

"Yes, in his professional capacity, Frau Laudin," was the hesitating answer, supported by a beseeching look.

"Then you had better go to his office. My husband is so extremely busy all day that it is impossible for him to see clients at home in the evening."

"Frau Laudin," the caller stammered, "I, too, unfortunately, am free only in the evening. I give private lessons . . . I should lose pupils. . . . The matter is so very pressing. . . . Besides, I have known Dr. Laudin for a long time. . . . In the office they might not let me see him personally. . . . And to explain this affair to one of the other gentlemen . . . I have no confidence in anyone but him. Do let me wait, Frau Laudin."

Pia Laudin reflected. She felt sorry for the young man. She turned to the maid, who, full of curiosity, had remained

standing in the kitchen door, and said: "Take the gentleman into the library."

She herself went into the sitting-room where her daughters, Marlene and Relly, fifteen and thirteen years old respectively, were sitting at the table, doing their home-work. If Pia did not look in on them from time to time they lost themselves in endless conversations, and could not keep their father company, as he liked them to do, during his belated meal.

"Fancy, children, the apples have come," she called out to the girls. "A great sack full of red-checked apples. Tomorrow you can store them in the pantry."

"That will be jolly," said Relly, and threw down her penholder. "Can't we do it this evening? I need some relief from this stupid geometry. Where is the sack? In the hall?"

"You stay where you are," Pia answered, controlling an impulse to laugh. All Relly's expressions were of an explosive suddenness; often one could hardly understand what she was saying, her tongue ran on so swiftly. "I don't want you girls to be running up and down when father comes home, and he may be here any moment now. He doesn't like it. By the way, have you been upstairs to see grandmother? You must keep her company for half an hour. But one of you at a time. Together you are too much for her."

Marlene looked up from her text-book. "This Cato, mother, is the most disgusting creature in the world," she said. "I can't endure his pretentious virtue. Austere? I call him a hypocrite. Such people have always existed, apparently, for the purpose of bringing decency into disrepute!"

"I can't understand such talk," Relly broke in, with an injured and belligerent air. "Why, he's an historical personage, and surely one must respect historical personages!"

"Why?" Marlene asked. "Why must one? That's mere prejudice. All these obligations are prejudices."

Relly was about to flare up, but her mother told her to be quiet. "Don't fight about Cato now," she said; "see to it that

you get through your lessons. And Marlene, you had better keep such revolutionary sayings to yourself."

Far away, beyond several doors, was heard the crying of a baby. "Aha, the dwarf Uistiti is making himself unpleasantly noticeable!" said Marlene, wrinkling her nose. This was the name by which, among themselves, half in tenderness and half in contempt, the sisters called their little fourteen-months-old brother Hubert.

Pia looked at her wrist-watch. "It's eight o'clock," she murmured. "I must see that he gets his bath. Now, no more about Cato, please; and don't forget grandmother, either."

"Mother can hardly stand, she's so worn out," said Relly, when Pia had left the room. "I should hate to run a house. And I could never be as heroic about it as mother is. Other women sigh and are as cross as two sticks. They always want you to be astonished at all they do; they want you to say: 'Poor woman, how she has to plague herself!' But mother is serene early and late, and never takes it out of anyone when things go wrong; and if ever she has a headache she locks herself up in her room, and doesn't even tell father. I think that's truly heroic. Don't you?"

Thoughtfully Marlene moved her head from side to side. "Yes," she answered, "but if you go on chattering you will never get done."

Relly, however, who was passionately attached to her mother, would not permit herself to be interrupted. With dancing eyes and flushed cheeks she leaned far over the table and continued: "It starts early in the morning. The cook comes to ask what is to be the menu of the day. Next comes the grocer with his bills. Then the telephone rings. Then the linen has to be counted. Then the electrician comes. Then the telephone rings again. Then the dwarf roars. Then the chauffeur turns up for instructions. Then she has to see whether the silver has been cleaned. Next the nurse comes, and asks whether the dwarf is to be taken out. Long confer-

ences. Then comes the dressmaker, because our frocks have to be attended to. Then grandmother sends word that mother is to play a game of dominoes with her. The telephone again, the ladies from the charity association, the——”

“For Heaven’s sake, shut up!” Marlene cried, laughing, and put her fingers in her ears.

But when Rely was once well started it was not so easy to stop the flow of her discourse. With astonishing agility of speech, she continued: “And so it goes on, day after day and year after year. Cooking, baking, washing, roasting, mending, sweeping, dusting—she has to superintend everything, and think of everything. And when father opens the front-door everything must be as fresh as paint. There must be pleasant faces and not a speck of dust. The table must be laid, and the food exquisite, and the fires going and everything in its right place, and he doesn’t dream of the trouble it has all cost. I can’t imagine how mother stands it. And she stands it so well, too! After all, she is thirty-six, and when you look at her you could quite believe her to be no more than twenty-three. She doesn’t have to bedizen herself like Frau Arndt, or put on rouge like Frau Kadelka. Mother is just beautiful.”

Rely drew herself up; and there was pride in her face.

“Yes, she is a beautiful woman,” Marlene agreed, with a certain reserve.

2

When Pia returned from the room of her youngest child she heard resounding laughter from the floor below. She was almost immediately enlightened as to its cause. Rely had not been able to deny herself the pleasure of examining the sack of apples. The apples were the gift of some friends who lived in the country; Rely had spent many pleasant days with these friends, and the fruit was like a message to her. She

carefully undid the loosened cord, and the sack opened and collapsed; it was too late to do anything, and dozens of apples rolled out on the floor. She cried out, and Marlene joined her, and the maid rushed from the kitchen, and all three, kneeling on the floor, started merrily hunting the apples.

The confusion was at its height when the hall door opened, and Dr. Laudin appeared. "Well, well!" he murmured, in good-natured surprise: "What are you doing there?"

The excited merriment quieted down. Pia greeted her husband, accompanied him to the bathroom, rang for the maid, told her when to bring in the dinner, brought out her husband's silk dressing-gown, gave him a casual report of the events of the day—Laudin had not been home since morning—and did her best to emphasize the agreeable details and minimize the annoying. What she said was not significant, but merely the objective summing-up of the mother and the housewife.

She had a gentle and at the same time careful voice, which began each sentence in a rather deep key and melodiously rose to a higher. She used only the commonest words in the simplest order. But her face had an expression of the most winning sweetness, which was further intensified by the peculiar radiance of the large gray eyes and the unclouded smoothness of the forehead.

She sat down at table with him while he ate. She herself had already dined with the children; that was the rule of the house, since no one ever knew when Laudin would come home. Sometimes it was at ten o'clock, sometimes even later. She sat as quietly as she spoke, almost modestly, and as though she had been idle all day and had spent the evening merely waiting for her husband. Her hands were folded in her lap, her head gently inclined toward the left; her corn-coloured hair was fastened in a simple knot in the back. It was unusually abundant.

Marlene sat to the right of her mother, Relly to the left.

Both regarded their father silently, the younger girl with a sincere and trustful expression, behind which there was a gleam of the cunning of a *gamine*; the older with clear and attentive eyes which nothing escaped. She followed a certain movement of the lines on his wide, arching, prominent forehead, a movement which she had often noticed, and which seemed to occupy her mind more than usual. Everything in this face was familiar to her: the veiled eyes that seemed, out of a kind of shame, to avoid looking at anyone for more than a moment, the broad, fleshy nose, the mouth shadowed by a thick moustache, the round, good-natured chin, and the thick brown hair, in which there was as yet no thread of gray. It was in every respect a generously modelled face, pale with overwork, stamped by the effort of thought, the features blending in a captivating harmony.

Marlene's lips were twitching as though she were longing to say: If only I knew what goes on inside of you! I would give a great deal to know what you are keeping from us! She had had this expression for weeks, but no one had noticed it.

Laudin said: "Fraundorfer wants to dine with us on Sunday. He seemed to be very anxious about it, so of course I invited him. I hope you don't mind, Pia. He intends, however, to ask you over the 'phone."

"He hasn't rung up yet," Pia answered. She smiled and nodded toward Marlene. "I'm perfectly willing, but Marlene doesn't seem to be very well pleased."

"But father knows I don't much like Dr. Fraundorfer," Marlene hastened to declare, and she blushed. "He's frightfully clever and cultivated, I know, but nothing in the world is sacred to him. And then it's horrible, too, the way he drinks. The other day when he was dining with us he emptied a whole bottle of wine by himself, and as if that weren't enough he asked for cognac."

Relly's eyes were full of amazement. But whether she

admired her sister's temerity or rather deprecated it one could hardly say.

"Ah, you children!" Laudin answered. "You are so ready to pass judgment. What do you know about a man like Egyd Fraundorfer? He has his reserves; you can't reach his ultimate ego. And as for things sacred—precisely what is 'sacred'? Does one carry it about for show? But consider for a moment his relation to Nicolas, his son. Think of all the affection behind that, the shy and secret affection, the almost romantic love. You must go beyond mere words."

Marlene hung her head. Relly smiled in triumph.

Laudin too smiled. "To be sure, if I brought you Nicolas, you'd like that a great deal better, Marlene," he said, teasingly.

Marlene nodded, so that her pigtailed danced, and looked at her father with radiant eyes. "I do like him, that's true," she said. And Relly seemed to share this taste, for she, too, blushed.

"Not too much, I hope," Laudin answered. "I'm afraid, too, that your rival is too strong for you. The boy lives wholly for his music. I saw in the paper yesterday that next week he is going to conduct for the first time at the choral society. Quite a respectable accomplishment at eighteen."

He had finished eating; he laid down his knife and fork, and smiling, drew from his coat pocket a little india-rubber donkey. "This is for Hubert," he said. "I bought it for him to-day, to have the pleasure of seeing him play with it." He put the toy on the table.

"Again!" cried Pia, in affectionate reproof. "But you have just brought him those chimes! Really, Friedrich, you're spoiling him!"

"Spoiling him?" asked Laudin, and shook his massive head. "On account of this little toy? Good heavens! Consider, Pia, by the time the boy is fifteen and we are able to get some insight into the results of his bringing-up, I shall be sixty-three. Or we had better say should be sixty-three. For we

can't, of course, be sure that I shall live so long. So drop the little rubber donkey into the scale of our evil possibilities, my dear." He kissed her hand.

The words were jesting, but there was a sombreness behind them which all seemed to feel. "I didn't mean it that way," Pia said soothingly. Then she added: "I have a disagreeable surprise for you. A young man has been waiting for you in the library since half-past seven. His name is Konrad Lanz. He would not be put off, and insisted on seeing you at any cost. You know I haven't the heart to turn people away; it's a fault, and I see from your expression that I should have done so. Forgive me."

"Yes, Pia, one must have a refuge somewhere," Laudin answered with a perceptible reproach. "But since the thing has happened I had better attend to the man at once." He rose, nodded to Pia and the girls, and went out.

Konrad Lanz sat crouching in a corner of the great library, which was illuminated by the light of a single bulb. When Laudin entered he rose hastily, and went up to him, saying: "I beg you to forgive my audacity, Doctor. I know how precious your time is in every sense. But I didn't know to whom else to turn——"

"I don't see, however, Herr Lanz, why you didn't take the usual course," Laudin interrupted him, dryly. "Like every worker, I am entitled to my hours of rest."

The young man bowed shyly. "I tried to explain to Frau Laudin and to offer her my excuses," he said. "I can continue my studies only by giving private lessons. From seven in the morning until seven in the evening I cannot freely dispose of my time without suffering severely as a result. I am wholly without means, wholly; my sister Caroline, whom I now have to support, is equally destitute. So I thought that if I were to appear in the office of so well known a lawyer as yourself I should be sailing under the false colours of a client who can pay a fee. And to confess my poverty there seemed

to me a more impudent procedure than to present myself privately as a suppliant. I considered this the more honest course. Then, too, I was afraid that I would not get to see you personally. And for all these reasons, and also because I have known you for a long time, and have confidence in no one but you, I—I ventured——”

“Really? You say we’ve known each other for a long time? How?” Laudin once more interrupted the nervous flow of the student’s words. He pointed to a chair. But Lanz did not see the gesture; he drew a deep breath and continued rather more calmly: “Eleven years ago I lived with my parents in Wasa Strasse, in the same house with you, Doctor. I saw you almost daily when I started for school in the morning. You used to come downstairs with a brief-case, and this brief-case inspired me with the highest respect, with something like awe. To me it was the symbol of everything mysterious. It often happened that I would wait for you at the door, at the risk of being late for school, only that I might get a glimpse of your brief-case. But that isn’t everything, that isn’t the main thing. . . .” He hesitated.

Suddenly Laudin observed him more sharply. “I remember,” he said, and laid his forefinger diagonally across his chin. “Lanz . . . Lanz . . . Wasn’t your father a book-keeper? Wasn’t he employed by a firm in St. Margaret’s? The firm failed. . . . Your father had invested his savings in the business. . . . It was a fraudulent bankruptcy. . . .”

“It is most kind of you to remember all that,” said Konrad Lanz. “You stood by my father at the time in the most magnanimous way, and succeeded in forcing the creditors to repay him a great part of his money. My father’s gratitude was boundless, and without your help I could not have continued at college. You helped my sister, too, and got her a place. She was almost twenty at that time. My parents, to be sure, fared worse and worse, and two years later they died, at almost the same time.”

Laudin's features had lost their cool reserve. "Sit down," he said to Konrad Lanz, "and tell me exactly what brings you to me now."

3

"It concerns my sister Caroline," Lanz began, "but I must tell things in their proper order, and so I had better begin with the farm of Hartmannshof, and with Hartmann and his wife.

"Out near Kottingbrunn, not in the village itself, but on the road that leads to the mountain, there is a property, a country house with farm-lands, which belong to a certain Hartmann, and is therefore called Hartmannshof. It was the family property of Hartmann's parents. During the political collapse and the period of inflation he succeeded, by some lucky strokes of business, in saving a moderate fortune. Before the war he had been a builder in the country; he had repaired houses and built new roofs. But he gave up this business, and served in several communal offices. For instance, he was fire-inspector and surveyor for assessments. For years his health had been poor.

"He had never lived very harmoniously with his wife, whose name is Brigitte, but it had not come to an open conflict. She was a townswoman; before her marriage she had been a governess. She had always considered herself a cut above the other women on the farms. Yet she seems to have been a capable manager, one of those women who attend thoroughly to their affairs, and in whose household nothing is wasted. Hartmann was already over forty: he had lived with the woman for nine years and had two boys of six and eight, when a dull dissatisfaction, if you like to call it that, became increasingly intensified. He would wander aimlessly about the neighbourhood; he would neglect his obligations, and was unable

to apply himself steadily to anything. He avoided ever being alone with his wife, and it gradually appeared that during all this time he was nursing a single thought, which slowly ripened into a plan of action. He went to his wife one day and proposed to her that they should part for ever.

"The woman could not understand what was going on in him. In her opinion he was a simple-hearted person. And indeed he was that, but not as she thought. In addition she considered him secretive; she accused him of a certain furtiveness, and from all descriptions I cannot help thinking that he must have been afflicted with a very peculiar kind of sensitiveness, which made him seem, as it were, to be lying in ambush, especially in Brigitte's eyes. She was profoundly convinced that he must have a definite motive for demanding the divorce, and she took to zealously spying on him, in order to catch him in the infidelity which, according to her way of thinking, she was bound to assume. But her trouble was wasted. Finally, in fact, she was forced to give up this hope, and the man accordingly became more and more mysterious to her, so that at last she declared he was crazy. In the meantime not a day passed on which he did not speak of their separation; he said his present life was unendurable to him; it must be changed; he must have his freedom.

"The woman wanted to restore a semblance of peace, and because she thought that he would not consent to her conditions, she said, finally: 'Very well; I shall get a divorce; but first you must make Hartmannshof over to me.' He was taken aback; he did not know what to answer. Next day he said: 'I will think about it.' He thought about it for a week, and came to her, and tried to make her moderate her demand, or consent to a sharing of the estate. But she was not even satisfied to have the transfer of the property included, as is customary, in the decree of divorce; no, she declared that first she must have the house. Afterwards, one could discuss other things. So Hartmann went with her to a notary, and

together they went to the record-office, and had the house inscribed in her name.

"When this had been done she went to town and consulted a lawyer. Hartmann thought that everything was now on the way to being solved. But he was greatly in error. With the help of the lawyer the woman began a long intrigue of sheer delay and false promises. At last she came forward with a fresh demand. She wanted two hundred millions¹ for herself and her children. She said that she could not live and support her children on the property alone; she must have the cash too. It was a clear case of blackmail, and Hartmann did not know what to reply. Horror overcame him. The woman's greed destroyed whatever bond there may ever have been between them—so he himself expressed it later—and left her nothing but his contempt. His only wish was to break that chain. Possessions and property were indifferent to him, if he could only get back his own life again, and so he did not take the trouble to engage in contradiction or conflict, but once more did the woman's will. During the time that followed, Brigitte, precisely as she had done after the house had been turned over to her, made hypocritical preparations toward fulfilling her promise. And it was in this interval that Hartmann made the acquaintance of my sister Caroline. We have an aunt living out there, the widow of a tax-collector, who lives on her pension as best she can. My sister spent the winter with this aunt. Her health was impaired; she had worked in a dressmaker's establishment for several years, and her lungs had become affected. I won't praise Caroline; she isn't exactly pretty, and the years have made her fade a little, but she is good and compassionate, and has brains, too. Not a week had passed since they had first seen each other before they became

¹ The time of the story is that of the monetary inflation in Central Europe. The two hundred millions were in paper crowns and equalled twenty thousand Austrian schillings of the present stabilized currency, or about £550.

inseparable. Hartmann had a deep trust in Caroline. She had the power or the gift of making his oppressed soul feel erect once more, and of filling him with a new confidence. But, as was natural, his constitution had been deeply shaken. Now came these new and strong emotions. It was a cold, moist winter. Hartmann fell seriously ill and, as fate would have it, on a day when Brigitte had journeyed to the city once more in order to consult her lawyer. She had taken the boys with her. On the same day the maid-servant had run away; the woman had had a quarrel with her. Hartmann was alone and his fever rose. With difficulty he communicated with a neighbour and begged him to send word to Fräulein Lanz, who was living in such-and-such a place. Caroline came. She called in a doctor. She nursed him. For four days she did not leave his bedside for more than ten minutes. It was pneumonia. One may well say that she snatched him from the claws of death. The crisis was passed and the fever subsiding, when Brigitte appeared. She saw the situation at a glance. First of all she ordered Caroline to leave the house. She said: 'This is my house.' Then she covered Hartmann with derision. 'Ah, liar that you are, and play-actor!' she cried. At last I have you, at last I have tracked you down!' She talked herself into a greater and greater rage, partly because it was pleasant to her to be able for once to vent all the rancour that was in her. Up to now, she cried, she had let him lead her by the nose, and for the children's sake she had good-naturedly borne with his wicked goings on. Why, at times she had been stupid enough to believe in his innocence. Now, however, that the whole fraudulent business had come to light, there could, of course, be no further question of a divorce, and she meant to tell her lawyer so at once.

"She stuck to that. Hartmann knew that he had nothing to hope for. He knew her. He knew, too, now, that her intention had always been the same. She had simply cheated him. A week later, since he felt well on the road to recovery, he

got up in the night and sat down and wrote a will in which he left all the money which he still possessed, and which was deposited in securities in a bank in the city, to his friend, Caroline Lanz. After the necessary deductions in favour of his children there would still have remained one hundred and fifty million crowns. This was the sum he willed to Caroline before his death. Well, he signed the document, put it in the drawer of his old desk, locked the drawer, and felt that Caroline was provided for. Obviously there are states of mind which are satisfied by the existence of a mere document. Three or four days later he packed his belongings into a portmanteau, waited until the evening, and left the house. At the railway station Caroline met him, and they travelled on together. . . .

"They settled down in Styria. Hartmann had old friends there. He found a job with a cabinet-maker. He kept the books and made out the accounts. He became so popular with the working-men that they chose him as their spokesman. He earned as much as he and Caroline needed. They lived in a little flat on the outskirts of the town. At the end of the year a child was born to them. He was happier than he had been on any other day of his life; but you could tell that only from his eyes and gestures, for he had grown more silent than ever. He did his work with the greatest ease. I happened to see him at this time. He would often look at Caroline as though he wanted to thank her for having met him. I believe that no breath of trouble would have clouded his mind had he been able wholly to forget the years spent with his first wife. But he could not do that. When I was visiting them, he and I took a walk together, and he said to me: 'I used often to think of death, and sometimes wish that death would come to me; now my whole desire is to live, and each day seems too short.' That, you see, unfortunately, was the reason why the will which he had left at Hartmannshof had slipped so entirely from his mind. It didn't even occur to him to renew

it; he could easily have secured the interests of Caroline and their child by means of a second draft. Her position would be very different now.

"But I mustn't be too diffuse. He came home one evening from the factory with a violent chill; he went to bed and lost consciousness at once. It was not until the middle of the night that he regained it for a few minutes. During that brief space the dread overcame him that he would not have time to explain to Caroline about the will. Hitherto he had not been able to bring himself to do so, and had put it off from day to day. Every evocation of his former condition had become repugnant to him, and his disinclination to think of death and of the end of his happiness was extreme. But he had this last chance of telling her of everything, stating the exact sum in question, and giving her the key to his desk. Then he sank back on the pillows, and twelve hours later he was dead.

"It is useless to describe my sister's state of mind. It is easy to imagine. Brigitte was, of course, informed of Hartmann's death; she arrived in great haste, grabbed all the dead man's belongings, his clothes, linen, shoes, watch, ring, and departed in equal haste. Caroline, in her grief, had no thought of resistance, and the woman did not even stay for the funeral. Caroline and her child came to town with me—luckily I could give them a little attic—and when she had recovered from her first despair I told her: 'You must go out to Kottingbrunn and fetch the will.' So on Sunday a fortnight ago she took the child on her arm and went out there. I wanted to accompany her, but she said: 'No, I must go alone.' Well, she got there and asked to speak to the lady of the house. The two boys were standing by the door and staring at her. After a while Brigitte appeared. My sister stated her business. The woman looked her up and down, looked at the child asleep in Caroline's arms, and said coldly: 'As you please, there's no objection; go right up and fetch the scrawl yourself; if

ever it was in the drawer it will be there now.' Caroline went upstairs, and heard the woman coughing behind her. They went into the room; Caroline laid the child on the bed, took out the key, and tried to unlock the drawer. But she saw at once that the drawer was not locked at all. In it there lay a little pile of papers; Caroline took the papers out and examined them one by one. There were receipts, a few letters, a few sketches for buildings, but no will. The other drawers were empty, and had no locks at all.

"Caroline looked at the woman; the woman looked at Caroline. Neither said a word. Caroline's limbs began to tremble and she had to lean against the desk; all the blood rushed to her heart, because she knew, now, that she and her child were doomed to misery and want. Brigitte had folded her bare arms; she had been kneading dough, and her skin was white with flour. There was a repressed smile on her thin lips, as though to say: 'What proof have you? What can you lay at my door?'

"And so Caroline went away again. And that is all that happened. And now I ask you, Doctor, is there no way of forcing the woman to give up the will? Consider the situation of my sister. She is utterly helpless, with her little child. She is only a shadow of her former self. She cannot think of working. And as far as I am concerned, the best I can do is to pay the rent and buy bread, and a little milk for the baby. What is one to do? On the one hand, Doctor, there is clear justice; on the other hand, there is a wrong that cries to heaven. What can one do?"

4

Laudin reflected for some minutes. Then he said: "First of all, I must warn you not to harbour any illusions. The woman

has unquestionably destroyed the will; consequently she cannot give it up."

"But she cannot deny that it existed?" the young man cried.

"Why shouldn't she deny it?" Laudin answered, shrugging his shoulders. "Since she did not shrink from suppressing it, why should she now hesitate to deny its existence? How are you going to prove that the will ever existed, that it was, in fact, ever drawn up? But even if that can be proved, how will you bring the additional proof of her having had knowledge of it? One statement would be confronted by another, and your sister had no witnesses who were present when Hartmann made his final dispositions."

Konrad Lanz looked at the lawyer as though he had expected a miracle, and was now being fed on the harsh disillusion of facts. Laudin smiled at the young man's depression. "I am a lawyer, and must stick to the facts," he said. "Were I an infallible searcher for the truth, or only a little more gifted in that respect, I should not have to point out those tedious courses which soon discourage all, or at least most of those, who seek the road to justice. Nevertheless, your case interests me. Not only on your account, personally, but for impersonal reasons, too. I will see what can be done." He took a notebook from his pocket and wrote a few words in it. "To-day is Thursday. Could you get off for two or three hours on Saturday morning? Good! I think your presence is important. Be at my office by ten o'clock. The car will be waiting, and we will drive out to Kottlingbrunn. It is probable that we shall find Frau Hartmann at home so early in the day."

Lanz stammered: "How can I thank you, Doctor. . . . It's a real sacrifice. . . ."

Laudin waved the thanks aside. He rose, and accompanied Lanz to the door. There he stopped for a moment. "I can see that woman," he said; "I know that woman, trait by trait, and I know what she is going to say, word for word. It is a

type to be found in all its varieties, and one that is multiplying at an appalling rate."

"No doubt you know the type, Doctor, but I am afraid this individual example may surprise you," the student said shyly.

Laudin nodded. "That is precisely what these individuals have a habit of doing. Good night. Remember—Saturday at ten."

Pia had already gone to her room. When he entered she was sitting before her mirror and combing her hair, which, despite its length and abundance, yielded obediently to every gesture of her hand. She turned to him with calm, bright eyes, in which there was no shadow of questioning or curiosity with regard to his late caller, and said: "It has taken a long time."

"Yes, it has," he sighed, and dropped into an arm-chair.

"You must be tired, Friedrich. Go to bed now. I have had an apple and a glass of milk put by your bed."

"Your thoughtfulness puts me to shame, my dear Pia," said Laudin, in a tone that was obviously wearier than he had meant it to be. "I had intended to bring you some flowers. But when I left the office I found the shops were closed. That's the misfortune of people who have to confine their chivalry to mere theory."

"Well, instead of that, you bought the little rubber donkey for your son," Pia answered, and looked at him jestingly.

"She forgets nothing, this woman," Laudin lamented in mock despair. "She forgets nothing." Suddenly, he took his handkerchief and pressed it to his face. When he looked at it he found it full of blood that had come from his nose. He ascertained by a glance that Pia had not noticed this. He rose, and kissed her very carefully on the forehead, and left the room. She heard him cheerfully whistling a tune from a light opera, and nodded to him in spirit. But before he could have reached his room the whistling broke off, abruptly, in the midst of the melody, and silence fell.

5

In the upper story of the villa were the children's rooms. In one of them lived little Hubert with his nurse; in the room opposite Marlene and Relly slept.

Marlene sat in her white nightdress at the table, writing in an exercise-book which was marked "Diary." Her pretty, round little head, with its rounded cheeks, its round little nose, its forehead like her father's, and its charming and expressive mouth, was bent over the page. She held her eyes as close to the paper as a child learning to write. Her two thick, ash-blond braids hung down on either side as far as the legs of the chair.

Relly lay in bed with her hands clasped behind her head and blinked wearily. "When will you be done with your scribbling?" Her voice resonantly broke the long silence. "I want to go to sleep."

"Who keeps you from sleeping, little scallywag?" Marlene asked in her clear, gentle voice. "Are you forced to grumble? Why don't you sleep? I'm as quiet as a mouse."

"In the first place, mice are not quiet," Relly replied belligerently. "In the second place, your pen scratches, and in the third place, this whole business of scribbling irritates me. Why do you always have to be writing? I don't understand."

"And because you don't understand, you try to pick a quarrel," Marlene answered, with a smile in which there was the calmness of her sense of superiority. "I've explained to you over and over again that I try to account to myself for things, and that's why I write down whatever interests me. If no one else will answer my questions I must try to find an answer myself. You, of course, have no ambition to keep your thoughts in order. You let them come and go. But that's being no more responsible than the baby."

"Oh . . . but that's . . ." Relly was enraged, and unable to find a suitable epithet. "I really don't know what to call it!"

"You mean I'm trying to be grown-up and didactic," Marlene answered, mockingly, "and so you want to convince me by the method of the 'Upper Dogs' who fight with indignation and not with logic!"

"Upper Dogs" was an expression which Relly herself had invented, and which meant: dignified, grown-up ladies and gentlemen who feed young girls on moral precepts and irrational remonstrances.

Relly leaped up. Her honest blue eyes flashed. It enraged her horribly to be put on the same plane with the Upper Dogs, whose lack of sincerity and sound reason in controversy often made her so indignant that Marlene, more restrained by nature, had some difficulty in soothing her. Because, of course, in the presence of the Upper Dogs it was necessary to behave oneself. One had to pay them the respect that seemed to be their due, and thus one fell into a state which was a painful blend of apparent deference and inward scorn.

Relly was not a girl who could accept an unjust reproach in silence. She defended her view, that it was unseemly to attribute undue importance to your own affairs, even in the privacy of your thoughts. To be sure, you had to gather experiences, but you mustn't be always analysing and criticizing. To observe was one thing. But it was sheer spiritual arrogance to try to make generalizations. Also it was confusing. You should watch life, and act from inevitable impulse, not on the basis of a scheme laid down on paper.

She grew violent, even insulting, and in her youthful vigour she recoiled from no violence of expression. But she was Marlene's equal only in the tempo of her speech; in all other respects she cut a sorry figure. For Marlene was precise and subtle, and could arrange her words like a very rhetorician, so that Relly constantly lost ground, like one who should oppose an agile fencer with a clumsy cudgel. And this, of

course, increased her vexation, and when she saw that she had lost the argument she threw herself back among the pillows, turned her face to the wall, pulled the counterpane over her ears, and lapsed into stubborn silence.

Marlene, too, had grown warm in the course of the dispute; her cheeks and ears glowed. She appeared to regret the wounding observations by which she had challenged her sister. She seemed about to make efforts toward reconciliation; but she got no farther than a peaceful clearing of her throat. Relly paid no attention to her; soon she stirred no more, and Marlene gave up any further attempts.

The vivid discussion had not been confined to the matter of its original subject. The question whether Marlene had the right to record and analyse and pass a written judgment on her conflicts with the world, her opinions and experiences, had of necessity led to a dispute concerning those conflicts themselves, concerning those small, profound, intense, and usually very secret experiences, and had thrown upon them a more or less treacherous light.

First of all Relly had criticized Marlene for her impudence in edifying their father with her opinion of Dr. Fraundorfer. What had induced her to do it? What right had she to do so? Surely she had seen how disagreeable it had been for their father; she knew that Dr. Fraundorfer was father's best friend. Marlene seemed to be crushed for a moment. Then, with assumed innocence, she felt obliged to ask her sister whether in this matter she was not substituting moral indignation for jealousy? Unconsciously, of course; she didn't accuse her of actual craftiness. But she had grown red as a cherry when her father had teased her about Nicolas Fraundorfer. . . . Relly flared up and defended herself violently against this perfidious suspicion. "Oh!" she cried, and "Goodness gracious!" She, Relly, jealous? She begged Marlene to be so good as to recall how shamelessly she herself had flirted with Nicolas the other day when he had sat playing the

piano. She, jealous? Surely she had something better to think of. Now, if Marlene were to accuse her bosom friend, Laura Arndt, of jealousy, that was comprehensible; there was some reason in that. This annoyed Marlene, and she drove Relly mercilessly into a corner, so that Relly took refuge in certain gross indiscretions and crude references to her sister's impulses toward rebellion and independence. And Marlene, frightened at the expression of things which she had barely considered in her secret thoughts, finally commanded her sister to keep within decent bounds.

Now she sat there, alone with her thoughts, gnawed at the penholder with her little teeth, and, frowning, began once more to write:

"Relly has divined that a discord exists between mother and myself. That hurts me. I've tried so hard to let no one notice it. But she has the eyes of a lynx. Just as she suspected that time how little enthusiastic I was over the birth of our little brother. But how could I have been? Suddenly an intruder presented himself, a funny little tyrant who greedily bit off a huge piece of our private little world. But what horrified me most was to hear her say that about father. It slipped out, of course, to her own utter dismay. She turned quite pale. Poor, impetuous Relly! She always lets her temperament run away with her; that can lead to no good. And is it really true that I am beginning to question my father's right to his authority, and that I can no longer give him the unconditional respect which he has a right to demand, and which he surely deserves? That is what she declares. She says she feels it. She says she reads my expression. Is she really right? I must examine myself. Surely she must be wrong! Only . . . I can't deny that for some time past something in father's bearing has depressed me—even that characteristic courtesy of his, that considerateness which he shows not only to our mother and ourselves, but to everybody to whom I see him speak. It seems to me sometimes as though he were sparing

people only because he knew something ugly about each one of them, or as though he were fighting a heaviness in his own soul, and had not the courage to admit it to himself. Mother is utterly unsuspecting, and that is really what I blame her for. Of course one is never sure about her. She listens to everyone and lets everyone state his case. And yet I have the impression that her interest in father hasn't quite the right quality. My notion of human relationships is a different one, and I want my life to be differently built. But that may be a futile effort. It may be that one can do nothing by mere willing. How one is surrounded by riddles! My worst quality at present is that I am full of distrust toward people, and so I seem to scent evil everywhere, especially hypocrisy and oppression. I hope God isn't angry with me on that account, and, like Relly, considers it a wicked curiosity."

In this young soul, as may be seen, there reigned an unquenchable longing for truth, a longing that had no stamp of selfishness, no mere inclination to pry, no breath of conscious sophistication. The condition of the world has obliterated the boundary between the generations. We see a generation awakening ten years before the natural period of its maturity, and if on the one hand we see children becoming criminals, so on the other hand the seriousness of our age produces spirits enlightened before their time.

All Marlene's actions bore witness to an instinctive rejection of moral sloth—the very manner in which she wrote, in which she reflected on what she had written, even the physical gesture with which she finally closed her book and locked it in a drawer.

With a glance of smiling indulgence, she slipped into bed beside her sleeping sister.

The great reputation of Friedrich Laudin had had its origin in a sensational divorce case in 1910, in which he had been the advocate representing Prince K——, a magnate by rank, as well as a millionaire manufacturer. The suit had involved extremely difficult problems of law, questions of property, and proofs of paternity, and had led to diplomatic complications, and finally to an interpellation in parliament. Through all these dangers and difficulties Laudin had exhibited incomparable tact, with the result that not only his client, but even his opponents, had every reason to appreciate his judicial acumen and profound learning, and above all the distinction and restraint of his attitude.

He had ever since been considered one of the leading lawyers of his country, especially in matters of domestic difficulties, controversies concerning guardianship, suits for alimony, for inheritances and other dispositions of property. In the course of the years the professional activities of his office had become so extended that he could give his personal attention only to the most important and difficult cases. The great majority of cases he left to the men in his office, all experts, some of them trained by himself, and reserved to himself only a supervisory capacity.

The attorneys, notaries, copyists and secretaries who were associated with him loved and respected him without exception. They never heard a harsh word from his lips. He was never irritable, never impatient, never tempted to make a scapegoat of anyone in his employ. He had an exact knowledge of the capacity of each, and therefore avoided equally moods of undue exaction, or mere slackness, or indulgence due to cowardice. In that office confidence never begot weakness, because all mutual relations were clearly defined. Associates of many years' standing found intimacy definitely checked

at a certain point. Laudin's very courtesy, if nothing else, preserved a certain distance. His ultimate opinion often remained obscure. But what he expressed sufficed to determine the appointed lines of action.

He had never touched cases that seemed to him unsound or even doubtful. He refused to represent a client unless he felt that he could make that client's cause his own. He was in a position to choose. His reputation and his large income made it possible for him to refuse all questionable cases. If he could not be guided by conscience where he had consented to act as advocate, he refused his assistance, and no material temptations, however great, had ever been able to affect a decision of this kind. But the fates and entanglements of men are not always so simple, nor their characters so easy to judge, that any man, even the most experienced and the best schooled in knowledge of the human heart, can, by the mere purity of his own character, avoid situations in which he finds himself at variance with his own convictions. This happened to Laudin quite often, more frequently as the years went by, and usually in just those cases in which prudence had bidden him to hesitate. Suddenly he found himself involved; the threads could no longer be torn; he had been deceived and self-deceived, and now that he realized it he had neither the right nor the power to retrace his steps. He attributed this to overwork, to the accumulation of harassing obligations, to the decline of his own powers, of his insight, of his judgment. But these were not the true causes. Perhaps he reflected too little upon the part which the spirit of his time had in these matters, and, amid the turmoil of business, and under the pressure of a thousand engagements, was less capable of awareness of certain changes in the world than other men who were less involved in the actual actions and passions of the day.

He was considered a pattern by the bar, and an ornament to his profession. He was highly esteemed by the authorities,

and the judges of the highest courts of appeal regarded with initial favour a cause which he represented. Many members of the judiciary had been his school or university friends. In the years 1911 and 1913 the Government had appointed him chairman of a commission which was to negotiate a loan in England and America. Although in both cases the negotiations had failed in their essential purpose, he had shown such skill and wisdom that he had earned the appreciation of his employers, and had been decorated on several occasions, a circumstance which he preferred to ignore. Seven years later these services of his were remembered, and it was believed that he was the right man to protect the economic interests of the wrecked, crushed state, and be the advocate of his country at the bar of foreign Powers. It was proposed to establish a position for him as plenipotentiary with almost unlimited discretionary powers and corresponding emoluments. He declined the offer. It was more pressingly renewed. He declined once more. He assigned many reasons for his refusal. He kept the most decisive to himself.

Friedrich Laudin was the son of a Silesian country schoolmaster. He had grown up in the narrowest circumstances, and his years of study had been a continuous battle with want. His rise, accompanied by constant privations, had been slow. He owed everything to himself, nothing to chance. He despised ignoble diplomacy, the influence of acquaintances, the favour of those in power, the advantages of mutual secrets. In a country where every official advancement was habitually gained by personal influence, mutual favouritism and rewarded partiality, he went silently and confidently upon his lonely and independent path.

In 1906, in the interests of the widow of a certain Councillor Rossi, an official in the Institute of Military Geography, who had met his death in the Bukovina, he instituted a lawsuit in which the lady claimed her inheritance from her husband's brothers. A year later he married Pia Rossi, the

daughter of the Councillor's widow. The latter had since been living in the house of her son-in-law.

7

Laudin was surrounded by an atmosphere of such silence and isolation that there was really no one in his circle who had his entire confidence. This secretiveness, which his calling had made necessary, and which his strict conception of the honour of that calling had made complete, had gradually communicated itself to all the circumstances of his life, and was now a part of his very nature.

No one, in fact, could have told you anything definite about him. People knew his characteristics, or at least those that met the eye and influenced his environment, but no one knew the groundwork of character from which they sprang. Many people called him impenetrable; others called him mysterious; there were even a few who accused him of juggling with mystifications. Even exact observers of his life and conversation failed to form a settled opinion concerning the man; on the contrary, they were forced to revise their views and impressions at every encounter. Most people found that troublesome, of course, and in their dealings with him they could not get rid of a certain psychical discomfort. This was becoming more pronounced, since as the years went by he exhibited an ever more definite inclination towards a pedantry which expressed itself in precise punctuality and love of order.

Yet a magic went out from his personality, felt most strongly by those who had entrusted him with their affairs. It could not be said that this magic consisted in goodness, for he was neither sympathetic nor frank. In professional conferences his attitude was far oftener one of serious vigilance rather than one of amiable *bonhomie*, which the majority of his

colleagues adopted as their favourite pose. Nor was it his native courtesy; for this was evidently only the external form into which he cast his human relationships. The atmosphere of confidence that surrounded him did, no doubt, attract and calm others, but it had no relation to the activity of a sovereign and persuasive will. Perhaps it was something stamped upon his glance and features—a knowledge of the souls of men, of the intricacy of their fate; an experience of men and of the way in which men live together that had been confirmed by a vision of the endless variations and distinctions of humanity; a knowledge that had irresistibly penetrated his very soul and blood and brain, concerning every form and every degree of human fraud and craft and cruelty and misunderstanding and falsehood and greed and slavery and avidity and passion and crime. Perhaps it was that.

For no one's insight had penetrated more deeply than his own into the machinery of our social life. For more than fifteen years it had been his almost exclusive occupation to search out the untenableness of those social relations which had been entered into in the name of the law and in the name of religion, with a claim—and this claim was usually sincere at the time—to eternal endurance. Thus there had opened out before him a stupendous vision of the combinations of men in society in general, the minglings of the different strata of the social world, its nervous and arterial system, so to speak; the interests by which certain groups are bound to each other, or by which they are divided in combat. More than that: he had an insight, with whose spacious and comprehensive abundance no chronicle or memoir could compare, into the private affairs of all callings, classes, and professions, the rise of some, the downfall of others; into fantastic events and tragic complications, strange mutabilities of fortune, guilty and guiltless misery and sheer absurdity, mere silliness, madness and shame.

Before his eyes, as before those of a priest in the confes-

sional, the motives of human action were laid bare; he had to seek out the ultimate origin of decisions, and to pass judgment upon their final effects. He had to acquire a knowledge not only of what had happened; initiation and development were not hidden from him. He had to know the process itself, the *curriculum vitae* of the acting characters, their modes of daily life, the quality of their attitudes, their plans, their habits, their vices, their diseases, their associates, the sources of their money, their reputation for good or ill. He took no account of shame, nor could he spare that feeling. It was a part of his office and of the execution of the tasks that were required of him that men had to strip in his presence, and that he, careless of their sensitiveness, brooded over every wrinkle, over every pore, over every secret woe.

One would imagine that he would gradually have lost the capacity for astonishment, that no curiosity would ever stir him again, nor any horror, nor any revulsion, nor even pity. But this was not the case. In a letter to Egyd Fraundorfer—a letter of recent years, written in Berlin, whither one of his great cases had summoned him—he had written: "Surely the soul can become inured to hardships even as the body can. But I have no experience of any such process. If ever I had a psychic callous I have lost it in the course of my activity. This seems to be connected with a characteristic which I find hard to describe, but which I noted in myself even in my childhood. If anyone struck me I immediately got a clothes-brush, and kept on brushing my coat for fifteen minutes at a time; if I happened to witness some brutality in the street I hastened home, and in all the rooms in which there was a clock I set the hands of the clock to the hour and minute at which the thing had happened. I did not know then how to explain this curious impulse and I don't know to this day. Later in life that kind of impulse caused in me those attacks of mere whimsicality which you have often teased me about. For instance, I can't possibly go to bed without first having

arranged the objects on my desk in the precise order in which, year in and year out, I am accustomed to seeing them. Sometimes, after an exciting session in court, a fever of exactness seems to come over me. I can't rest until I have counted the nibs in the drawer and noted down their number; or else I erase the marks in a book that I happen to take up, or I am impelled in the middle of the night to get up and shave. I could tell you many strange things like that, but what purpose would it serve? I suspect that we are here dealing with an automatic transference and sublimation of inner processes into external habitual acts. Thus a rind is gradually grown, under which the kernel of one's nature remains unwounded, or is, at least, less vulnerable. Don't you agree with me?"

Had he been an historian of morals, or a social philosopher, he could have written the most exhaustive treatise concerning marriage and its development in the twentieth century. He could perhaps have disclosed the motives which led to marriages and those which led to their dissolution. With equal dryness and objectivity he could have described the innumerable unions which were rooted in frivolity and credulity as well as those which were the fruit of hasty passion and lying sensuality, and others which were due to ambition, vanity, the desire to get on, the greed for money, the weakness of mere good nature, or an ordinary passing whim, as well as those which people contracted in utter indifference or disconsolate resignation. He could have sketched the characters of men who won themselves a woman by craft as they would secure themselves a job or a tip on the money market; of others who enter into marriage as one goes into a coffee-house or to a card party; of such as had the choice between marriage and suicide, and preferred the former; of men who kept mistresses with their wives' money, or forced their wives to become prostitutes, and with these earnings played the part of fine gentlemen in a society that had knowledge of all

things, and closed its eyes to all things so long as there was no open scandal; of those who had been deceived for years, and yet would have pledged their souls on the fidelity of their companions; of the morally slothful who found it easier to overlook the obvious and retain the comfort of their lives; of the impotent who became the helots of women, and of men who ruined the bodies of women because they knew as much concerning them as a butcher knows of the weaving of silk.

He could have told stories of women for whom a ball-dress outweighed the welfare of their children, and of others who lowered themselves to the level of domestic animals, sometimes out of fear of their husbands, and sometimes out of a deluded fascination; of those who adored their husband as a god and in their idolatry would rather have torn out their hearts than become convinced that he was a wretched little mortal with a streak of the rogue. He could have told stories of women whose strength is sapped by an annual child-bed while the husband and begetter, with a feeling of duty well-fulfilled, passes his nights in taverns or clubs or with mistresses; of others again who carelessly waste their husbands' hard-earned substance, and of those who cling to every farthing while the man heedlessly loses hundreds of thousands in senseless speculations. He knew the story of the harpies of charity, whose houses were as inhospitable as a railway-station, and of the immature in mind and soul who were driven into marriage and bled to death therein.

He could have told and explained how all these people, couple after couple, plunged into marriage, frivolous and ignorant, half-strangers to each other, often without any adequate sense of responsibility or firmness of mind; the deceived and the deceivers, who signed contracts which they had already determined not to keep before the pen was out of their hands or the ink dry upon it; how they begot children to whom the lives of their parents were a perturbing and

tormenting dream; how they came to him, the woman or the man, panting, one or both, to be free of one another again; how they brawled; how short their memory was; how shamefully they spoke of one another; how they betrayed one another; how hatred, contempt, satiety, and the desire to hurt had obliterated from them every vestige of human dignity, every memory of the exchange of vows that were supposedly sacred.

All this he could have accorded, and in the end he might have felt the pleasure of the statistician in incontrovertible facts and the laws of their grouping.

But it seemed as though his bosom were an abyss into which every single event, with its originators and protagonists, dropped even as a stone drops into a deep well. It remained in the depths; it was no more either to be grasped or seen.

It is a fact that a long sequence of similarities has often a paralysing effect upon the soul. It can hardly be assumed, however, that this constituted the burden which so obviously weighed upon Laudin, and which had nothing to do with the mere pressure of work. Circumstances which he himself did not take into account complicated the problem, and these circumstances were stronger, more wearisome, more painful than his constant appearances in court, or his consultations with his clients. It may be that a deed or brief, with its dry cataloguing of facts, often spoke to him more eloquently than the most voluble descriptions, or all the wretchedness and dissatisfaction which his clients brought him in person. Behind all this lay something more. The decisive, the utterly disillusioning, the distorting truth was not what they said. Not that, but what lay behind it all. For it is to be remembered that he knew, and had to know, those murky backgrounds, those intricate labyrinths of despair—those vast masses of material, in writing and in print, the proof and record of treachery and deceit, perpetuated in all sorts of documents, which were first flourished in court, and then

stored away, to grow yellow with age in files or deed-boxes. These documents were like keys with which he could have opened the houses of men, those dwelling-places of strife and hatred, in whose bedrooms their kisses had turned to poison, and their embraces to convulsions of rage. He knew their secret courses, their activities which dreaded the light. Such was his task. In this arsenal of his were stored up all the proofs of dissension, and therewith his memory and imagination were filled as the booth of a huckster is filled with worm-eaten trash, with unclean and grotesque relics, trivial and repulsive, from the defiled marriage-bed to the unpaid milliner's bill, from the dregs of arsenic in a coffee-cup to a garter lost in a house of assignation, from a forged passport to a forged cheque. Then there were letters, mountains of letters, mountains of lies, mountains of suffering, and mutual insults, and hypocritical promises; letters in which people haggled and vowed and swore and accused and flattered and jeered and cursed and begged; letters that were illiterate and letters written in the most exquisite style; business-like communications—"I have the honour to inform you"—followed by the coldest perfidy, or even by poetical outpourings; threatening letters, spying letters, blackmailing letters, profoundly moving documents of love and of forgiveness, and others that were bursting with irreconcilable hatred and diabolical calumny.

And upon all these the silence of Laudin had set its eternal seal.

8

It was not his habit to groan under his burden. The only complaint which he had been heard to make in the last few months was something like this: "Affairs are accumulating to such an extent that I sometimes feel alarmed. What will

it lead to?" He always hastened to add: "I don't say that on my own account; I'm thinking of social conditions in general." And when he said this he did his best to look care-free and contented.

However exhausted he was by discussions, consultations, conferences, long hours of dictation, attempts at reconciliation, telephone calls and the sessions of the court, there was always a smile on his face which was not only kindly, but which seemed anxious to deny the measure of his exertions. This was true, at all events, so long as he knew that people were watching him, and that he had to be prepared to deal with them.

But when he was alone indoors and safe from all observation, a dim veil seemed to fall over his face. The tension of his muscles relaxed, and the smile died, and a deep furrow appeared between his eyebrows, and he threw himself into a chair, and stared motionlessly in front of him for many, many minutes.

At the beginning of the previous autumn Pia had once come upon him in this attitude. He had not heard her coming; she halted silently on the threshold, and watched him, and then disappeared without a word. When she was out of the room she pressed a hand against her cheek, and there was consternation in her eyes. But she never betrayed by a syllable the fact that she had watched him in his loneliness. If a man falls from a high tower it may come to pass that in a few seconds he may have a vision of many years of life, and be aware of long-forgotten details, that stand out in a far more vivid light than when they were part of a fluid present. Similarly, it is possible that while a man is crossing the hall of his house, or going upstairs, or opening and closing the door of his office, there may race through his mind a thronging procession of faces, forms, words, and events.

In the smallest and most accidental of human actions it may be that the whole warp and weft of things is involved.

External action is the symbol of inward being, but that inner realm is like a black river whose shores are enshrouded in darkness. At moments a torch blazes above that river, or a tremor of fear makes the waters shiver, confusing the reflected image. And then a dream or a decision may be born; or perhaps decisions are but the consequences of dreams, and the dread of decisions is the fear of dreams which have been forgotten, or have not yet ripened into consciousness. The soul often works as long over the building of its dreams as the mind over the shaping of its ideas.

When Laudin looked at his bedroom and the things therein, to which he stood in a relation of slavery, his thoughts were lonely and discouraged, and when he extinguished the lamp all these objects dissolved in a darkness which had yawned for them in this very room, at this very hour, five to six thousand times. Out of the distance of the years, when a forgotten freedom had given wings to his feet, there arose the cry of a living experience. But the way back to those years was peopled by ghosts.

One day his daughters and their friends were playing a game of questions and answers. He played with them for a while. The beautiful Laura Arndt asked him: "Who would you like to be if you weren't yourself?" He answered, with a smile, much to the girls' astonishment: "I'd be perfectly satisfied if only I weren't myself; I shouldn't have any other wish left." Later Marlene tried to cross-examine him on the subject. He was embarrassed. "It isn't worth your while, my dear, to think about it. At your age you'd better stick to what's reasonable. At my time of life one may occasionally indulge in the irrational." Marlene shook her head.

On sunny mornings he would send the car ahead and walk some part of the way. His gait was lonely and discouraged. He shrugged his shoulders over a tasteless advertisement, or smiled indulgently at the small boys playing in the street, or lifted his hat courteously to an acquaintance, and all the

while he was probably absorbed in brooding over the foolish notion that he was utterly tired of being himself, and the question as to whether one could not strip off one's own character even as one can a worn-out garment. (Why? We repeat Marlene's question. Why should he not want to be himself? Who else could he be? Why is he so wretched in his own identity?) He would hear himself saying: "I might tell the dream to Egyd; it would give him something to interpret."

What dream? It was no dream at all yet; it had not yet been dreamed; it was about to be; it was for the present only a sense of discouragement and loneliness.

It is difficult to puzzle out the lives of active and practical people in their permanent outlines. Laudin helped people to see their errors, and to file away their shames. And it seemed as though there lay about him so many chains of which he had relieved others that the walls of a prison had grown up about him, built of these very chains.

He presented the appearance of a superior, calm, benevolent, well-disposed and often witty person. But was he all that in reality? Who was he in truth? At breakfast his daughters would appear in grayish-brown frocks. Why did those frocks vex him so? "Again those nun-like garments!" he said. It was the grayish-brown colour that annoyed him; it evidently reminded him of the fact that Marlene and Relly were equipped for school, and were to be trained to useful activities. Did he hate the useful? To be sure, these frocks made them look like the sparrows that twitter in winter on the fences by the roadside, frightened and frozen. But Marlene's clear, intelligent eyes were fastened upon him. And these eyes were so thirsty for knowledge, and at the same time so experienced, that this man of practical affairs was ashamed of being unequal to their demands. His inadequate answer to them was merely a glance which was shattered by the truth and vitality of youth.

The room was fragrant in its cleanliness. Pia sat at the table and buttered the rolls in her sweet deliberate way. She said: "It's freezing to-day, girls; you must put on your heavy coats." The nurse brought in little Hubert; he had just come from his bath, and his rosy face gleamed like a freshly-buttered bun. The little rubber donkey stood there, patient and melancholy, for he knew that he could not escape his fate, which was to be piteously maltreated by the hands of this huge human child, and at last to be destroyed. Radiantly Laudin rose and took his little son into his arms. A few jests, the same every day, a few familiar tendernesses. . . . Then he affectionately said good-bye to them all.

And what is the man really like? Who is he at bottom? We ask once again. . . .

9

Suddenly, on the stroke of ten, Konrad Lanz appeared in Laudin's office. This office was in an ancient building that had many passages, stairs, gateways, and inner and outer courtyards. Most of the rooms were so dark that electric light had to be used even by day.

The young man sat in the waiting-room. Here too were a lady and gentlemen who exchanged not a word or glance while they waited, although they were obviously man and wife, and a white-haired, shabby man who read a paper and coughed incessantly.

Lanz was not kept waiting very long. An old doorkeeper ushered him in. In the hall he met Dr. Laudin in his fur coat and thick gloves. From within could be heard the metallic rattle of the typewriters.

When they had entered the car, Laudin said: "You will forgive me, won't you, if I look over some documents while we're driving? I've got to be in court this afternoon, and I have no other time."

Konrad Lanz bowed shyly. He was obviously oppressed by the favour which the famous lawyer was conferring upon him, and could find no words.

Laudin opened his brief-case. "You see," he said, "this is the same old, mysterious case." His expression was pleasant. "You can amuse yourself by looking at it once more." He laughed deep in his throat, took out some papers in a blue wrapper, and was soon absorbed in reading them.

In forty-five minutes the swift car had reached Kottingbrunn. The chauffeur inquired of several persons where Hartmannshof was, and in five more minutes they were there.

It was a villa-like house near the public highway. Across the first story stretched a wooden balcony; a second, smaller balcony projected from the second story, under the pointed gables. The yellow stucco showed rents and tears, especially on the west side of the house. They passed through a vegetable-garden, in which the beds were covered with straw. On the left, where there was a little rise in the ground, they saw planks and stripped tree-trunks. Before the front-door of the house a lad was splitting wood. He had only a hostile glance for the two visitors. Two boys rushed excitedly out of the house; they passed Laudin and Lanz, and gave their whole attention to the car standing in the road.

Laudin turned to the woodcutter. "Is Frau Hartmann at home?"

The fellow shrugged one shoulder indifferently.

A woman appeared in the doorway. "What do you want?" she asked harshly, scanning the visitors, who were so unlike one another—the one inspiring her with respect by his height and his urbane distinction, the other, in his thin, shabby coat, gaunt, shy of glance, and more than modest in his bearing. Accustomed to estimating men according to their appearance, she could come to no conclusion here.

When Laudin gave his name she raised her narrow, almost colourless eyebrows; when, indicating his companion, he

uttered the name of Lanz, she grew pale. She waved her arm in the direction of the interior of the house, and murmured something about not being prepared for company, and its being cleaning day. In the narrow hall she looked about her hesitatingly, as though she were wondering into which room to usher the guests, and at the same time she seemed to be considering what might be the purpose of this visit, and for what she had better be prepared. At last she opened the door of a large room full of old, massive, well-preserved furniture, with immaculately white curtains at the windows, and a large green tile stove. She regretted that there was no fire, but there was no other room into which she could take them; if the boys had been at school it would have been different; there would have been a room free upstairs; but the school had been closed yesterday for a week. Several cases of chicken-pox had occurred, and a sanitary inspection was taking place. She said all this in a cold, hasty, abstracted tone, with which she tried to conceal her suspense. She moved two chairs away from the table, ran her open hand over the upholstered seats, and with a dry gesture invited her guests to be seated.

She wore a grey sweater buttoned to the throat, a woollen skirt, and over it a blue apron. She must have been about forty, but since her full face had few wrinkles, and her rather stout figure was kept in constant motion by a series of nervous and superfluous gestures, she seemed considerably younger than her years. Everything about her was remarkably neat, and, for a woman who did her own work, her hands were notably well cared for. Only her hair, of an unpleasant brownish red, straggled rather loosely about her head and over her low forehead.

Laudin sat down after he had courteously waited until Frau Hartmann had taken a seat. Konrad Lanz remained standing at a little distance from the two and looked with assumed interest at the porcelain cups and plates in a china-closet. "I hope you will pardon us for our intrusion," Laudin

began, with an extreme and almost exaggerated courtesy, "but what justifies me is that I come here in the interests of my client, Fräulein Caroline Lanz. Unfortunately Fräulein Lanz was prevented from accompanying me, and so her brother has been so kind as to come in her stead. The thing that I am forced to trouble you about is of no great importance—the establishment of a very simple fact. Two words and we are done. I am interested in discovering where the will of your late husband is deposited, and I should be very much obliged to you for the information. That is all."

Frau Hartmann sat straight as a poker on her chair. Not for a second did her eyes leave Laudin's face while she was listening, nor did her expression change. Since her whole attitude betrayed the utmost vigilance, it was obvious that she was not for a moment deceived by the lawyer's conciliatory tone. She answered, in a harsh voice: "I know nothing about any will. Why have I got to be bothered with that again? Didn't I let the Lanz woman go and look for herself? She used her own eyes. I said to her: 'Please go ahead and look.' She looked, and she found nothing. So why do you come and bother me?"

Laudin nodded in apparent agreement with her. "It is most unpleasant for you," he answered. "I know that. But the will was in existence. There is no doubt at all. Your late husband expressed himself to that effect in a way that could not be misunderstood. In spite of that, we would not trouble you by a renewed search here if, for the moment, we had not unluckily lost trace of the duplicate. It is only right to tell you that we have every reason to assume the existence of a duplicate, or rather of a later draft, and of the fact that it is in the hands of a definite individual."

There was nothing in Laudin's face to betray the fact that he promised himself any effect from these apparently careless statements. Nor did he seem to observe that Brigitte Hartmann's right hand closed convulsively over her knee.

Her expression did not change. She even summoned a thin smile to her lips.

"I am quite indifferent to the whole matter," she said, with a contemptuous movement of her head. "I have nothing to do with it, anyhow. He was free to do what he liked with his money. I don't see what anyone can do to me. The cash, as you know, is still in the bank. His estate has not yet been probated, so do as you like. The court appointed a guardian for my children; I have got my lawyer; so what do you think anyone can do to me?"

Laudin assumed an astonished air. "What do you mean, Frau Hartmann?" he asked, with that suave assumption of social equality which had evidently served his purpose in similar cases before; "what do you mean, precisely, by assuming that anyone could possibly 'do' anything to you? You seem quite to misunderstand the purpose of my call."

"Oh, no," Brigitte Hartmann interrupted him harshly, "I understand very well. I wasn't born yesterday, you know. You're trying to pump me, that's all. But who was there except that Lanz woman, to whom Hartmann would give a copy of his will? Not a soul. Why, he was so crazy—God forgive me the sin if it is one—that he didn't confide in anybody. You don't fool me, Doctor, if you'll excuse me for saying so, but out here in the country we just say right out what we mean. If you've got a duplicate of the will, I'd advise you to get hold of it first. Till you do, I don't see that there is anything to worry about." Her voice had grown loud and shrill, and she looked at Laudin like a woman whose consciousness of the justice of her cause was such that she intended to move not a hair's-breadth from her appointed path.

"The situation is not quite so simple," said Laudin, in his most ingratiating manner. "Your view of the thing is naturally somewhat unprofessional. Even assuming that the duplicate is lost—and we can safely drop that consideration for the moment—you are in no position to know whether we have

not a witness who would be willing to reaffirm under oath the statements of your late husband concerning the original will. Assuming, however, that such a witness does not exist, so soon as the matter is brought to court—and it will be, rest assured of that—the judge will make use of his power to examine you under oath. This means that you would have to swear that you had neither seen nor touched the will, nor even known of its existence. And there the matter would end. It would end, that is to say, until we recovered our proof to the effect that, contrary to your sworn oath, the will existed and had been in your house. Without any question of a third party you would then have been guilty of perjury, with consequences that must be clear to you. I must ask your forgiveness for this explanation, but you yourself seemed to stand in need of this item of legal instruction. So I have given it to you, and therewith fulfilled my duty.” He got up and bowed.

Brigitte Hartmann still sat up very straight in her chair. But now her left hand, too, clasped her knee. For a moment she seemed petrified. Then, rising slowly, and slowly folding her arms across her bosom, she spoke: “Nice things you’re telling me, there. Thank you most humbly for the instruction, Doctor.” Twice she curtsied jeeringly. “But why should I be treated to legal instruction? Did I run away from home, or he? Did I leave my children in the lurch, or he? He was up and gone one fine day, and it was the devil take the hindmost. It’s just as I am telling it: one fine day he was up and gone, without saying a word, and his wife and his children and his house and his farm could go to hell for all he cared. Does a real man act that way? Or one that calls himself a father? Is that written down in the law, too? Maybe you can give me some instruction about that! Did you ever hear of such a thing, except among the heathen? And I don’t believe it happens with them that the father of a family, married eleven years, picks up and leaves as if he were leaving

an inn; that he picks up the first woman he sees—you'll pardon me for being honest about it, young man—and disappears with her, and is never seen again. And then he goes to strange parts, and dies there like a dog, and treats his own flesh and blood as though it were dirt under his feet! Is that written in the law that you want to instruct me about?"

She had talked herself into a furious rage. Her lips had suddenly grown white and thin. As she talked more loudly and rapidly one became more and more aware of a gap in her upper teeth. With blazing glances she measured the two men. Konrad Lanz had turned his face to her, and regarded her with a sombre expression. Laudin's face was attentive and vigilant, with a superficial assumption of surprise. "You do, indeed, deserve a great deal of pity, Frau Hartmann, if things are as you state them," he said, and his tone was most sympathetic. "From all that I have been able to learn concerning your late husband, he seems to have been a very conscientious man, and not at all inclined to frivolous and impulsive action. One would, I should think, have expected such a man to make adequate provision for his family before seeking refuge with another woman. I am very much astonished. And, above all, one would have thought that he would have come to some understanding with you concerning a possible divorce or separation, and would have asked you to set him free. That, surely, was the least he owed you. Didn't he do anything of that sort? I confess it surprises me."

Brigitte Hartmann flushed slightly. It was like the breathing on a pane, and disappeared at once. For one moment she lost her composure. She regarded Laudin suspiciously; then a strange, sombre smile glided over her features. Several times she opened her lips to speak, and closed them again. She began to pace up and down the room, as though she were alone. Without apparent motive she pulled a curtain-string, and the curtain opened. "Divorce!" she said suddenly,

in a harsh, gloomy voice, "I could tell you a whole lot about that. Liberty! I've heard that word. Haven't you enough liberty? I used to ask him. By night or day you can go wherever you like. Do I try to stop you? If he had wanted to keep a woman? All right! He could have, as far as I'm concerned. Go ahead, if you can't help it. But a divorce? I hadn't the right to do that. Is holy wedlock a scrap of paper to go and tear up, if the whim takes you? But he talked and talked and talked. Well, I said, all right, I said, if it'll make you any happier. But only under such and such conditions. I've got to have my security. The world's got to know that it's not my fault. Well. All right. That was all done. But I've got a conscience. I'm a woman. I'm a mother. I couldn't. It was too sinful. How am I going to face my children? I asked him. And I asked myself, too. To the end of my days they could have reproached me that I had robbed them of their father. There was a voice in my heart that cried out to me—'No, Brigitte.' " With a strange passion she beat her fist against her breast. "The boys appeared to me at night, in my sleep, and begged me on their bended knees: 'Don't do it, mother.' So I went and visited the grave of my parents, and there I heard a voice: 'It's a sin; don't do it! Wasn't it my duty to cling to my own husband and fight the evil spirit in him? Why, one would have no religion, if one gave in to such weakness and wickedness. Oh, no!'"

She walked up and down, up and down, ever more excitedly, turned utterly in upon herself, or as though she were talking to the man who had long been a shade. It was the stifled recollection of contention, the re-aring of bitter old conflicts, the revengeful tearing open of old wounds. "I can never forgive him, never! Not in death, as I couldn't in life." The words came from between clenched teeth, and there was so much sincerity of hatred and unquenched bitterness in them that Laudin was visibly impressed, in spite of all he knew, and wondered whether he was not in the presence

of a human being whose cause was still doubtful, and who could not yet be condemned.

"It's not for me to discuss all that," he said, concluding the interview. "You said, just now, Frau Hartmann, that you were employing a solicitor. Take counsel with him. Or, if you prefer, you can settle the whole matter with me. I should be very glad. Merely send me a message. I shall wait until you do."

"As you like," said Frau Hartmann, standing up straight before him, and regarding him with a wrinkled forehead and a penetrating look. It seemed as though she wanted to speak again, but her tongue would not follow her bidding. She seemed to feel with vexation and disgust the compelling power of Laudin's personality, and to dread his departure, as though it were a danger from which she must protect herself. But she said no more.

During the drive back to the city Laudin leaned back with closed eyes in the corner of the car. Konrad Lanz, although he was intensely eager to hear his friend's opinion, was careful not to break the silence.

Finally, without opening his lids, Laudin said softly: "There you have her, living and breathing, the tigress of legality."

"And is there any hope for us at all?" the young man asked sadly.

"We shall see. She will come to me. Then we shall know more."

"You do truly believe then, Doctor, that she will come?" Doubtfully, Konrad Lanz shook his head.

"I not only believe it; I know it. And if I am not wholly deceived, we shall have some extraordinary revelations."

On Sunday morning, Pia, according to her weekly custom, gathered the bills which she could not and was not supposed to meet out of her household money and took them to her husband. Laudin was sitting at a desk in the library. Outside it had begun to snow.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Friedrich," said Pia, "but you know—our regular Sunday examination."

"Of course, my dear chief of all departments," said Laudin, in a jesting tone. "Duty is duty. Any very bad surprises? Let's see your horrible documents."

A storm had damaged the iron fence in the garden, and it had been repaired. A water-pipe had burst in the cellar, and had been mended. There was the telephone bill. The kitchen had been plastered. A new washing-machine had been bought, and an electric iron for the laundry. Coke had been ordered for the conservatory. The bills mounted up to thirty-five and a half millions.

While Laudin was looking through the bills, Pia stood beside him, leaning her arm against his shoulder.

He expressed no criticism. He had absolute confidence in Pia's management, and would, in fact, have considered it unworthy of them both to remark upon purchases which she thought necessary, and which commonly proved to be far-sighted acts of economy. He looked after her as she was leaving the room, awaiting her cheerful nod as she turned back once more at the door. And when she waved her hand he had set his features in the right expression. Then he bent over the desk once more, but instead of continuing the letter which he had begun, he drew all sorts of bearded and aquiline profiles on the blotter.

Pia sat at the telephone. First she complained to the dairy of the inferior quality of the milk; next, since it was Sunday,

she asked to be put through to the home of the upholsterer, and asked him why he had delayed repairing the sofa in the dining-room. He had had the material in his shop for a fortnight, and had promised either to come himself on Friday or to send his assistant. She was annoyed, and hung up the receiver.

She looked thoughtful. All these things, fences, water-pipes, washing-machines, stoves, coal, milk-cans, kitchen tiles, sofa-coverings, besieged her. And each thing had its special claim upon her. She could not rest; she could not think. Always something, craving attention or help, appeared before her eyes. The house was stuffed full of these things. They hung or lay or stood in every room. People were generally of the opinion that man needs things. But this opinion seemed utterly foolish and perverse; in reality, the matter was very different. It is things which shamelessly and impudently and importunately stand in need of man, and demand and misuse his strength and his time, as seems fitting to them.

Books demand to be dusted; doorknobs demand to be polished; carpets demand to be beaten. Cupboards demand to be set in order; beds demand to be supplied with linen; floors demand to be swept, and stockings to be darned, and garden paths to be covered with pebbles, and flowers to be watered. And in all these processes there was neither spirit nor reason. It did not suffice to grant these demands once or to grant them ten times. All things came again and again with their insolent and equally implacable demands. And if you pretended to be deaf or took refuge in some excuse, the result was dirt and disorder, and increased trouble, and a bad conscience.

Pia was the slave of things. They rose like a barricade even between her and her children. Marlene would call for her snow-boots; Relly could not find her French grammar; the baby's nurse clamoured for her luncheon; the chambermaid wailed because she could not find the key to the wine-cellar;

the cook complained because her oven would not draw. And though Pia did not personally hunt for the snow-boots or the grammar or the key of the cellar, or cook the luncheon or repair the oven, yet she was the court of final appeal to whom all in the house came with their needs. She had to advise and soothe and encourage and consider and pay; to praise some and blame others, and never think of herself.

Guests came not to her but to the house. When she went to the theatre or to a party with her husband, the things seemed to follow her, chattering and quarrelling, as though she were living in one of Andersen's fairy-tales. If someone paid her a compliment, saying that she was lovely or charming, all that she could think of was that she had to send to the chemist the first thing in the morning because the milk of magnesia for little Hubert had given out.

When the postman came she knew perfectly well that he had no letters for her; nothing, at all events, that concerned her alone, no secret, no shadow of anything that belonged to her alone. One might well have asked, Where is she? Where is this woman?

Was there such a person as Pia? Was she not rather absorbed in the fences and water-pipes and sofa-covers and milk-cans and snow-boots and carpets and door-knobs? Did the afterglow shine for her? Did any singer sing for her? Was she still capable of joy or sorrow, or longing, or sympathy with the world? Or had she not rather become a repository in which the names of things were written on slips of paper one after another, each with its price, or the damage it had sustained?

But Pia was unconscious of all this. Just as she was unconscious of how little she was still capable of feeling, so she was equally unconscious of her wants. She neither questioned nor quarrelled with her fate, nor philosophized about it. Her task was to watch and labour, and by evening she was weary. Hitherto, at least, she had not been summoned to any other

way of life; she knew of no other; the way appointed for her seemed the only possible one, and she tried to meet its demands.

II

As they were about to sit down at table, Fraundorfer had sent a message that he could not come to lunch, since he was going to an early performance, but would drop in for coffee at two o'clock. They were accustomed to his little rudenesses; no one paid any attention, with the exception of Pia's mother, who, in her morose and morbid mood, could not reconcile herself to the insult, as she called it under her breath. But since she forgot any subject she was talking about at the end of two sentences, she wandered off in her monotonous querulousness to a discussion of people and matters a thousand miles removed from Fraundorfer. It was rare for her to share the family meals. She suffered from as many complaints as the day has hours, and with the egoism of old age regarded herself as the centre of interest not only of the household, but of life itself, in so far as it came to her through the newspapers and conversation. Whenever Laudin turned to her, as he always did, with the tenderest consideration, she gave him a scared look out of her dull black eyes, as though she had to recall to whom she was speaking, and then gave him a melancholy nod, and a reply that had no connection with what he had asked or stated. Relly and Marlene, who, in their fits of irreverence, called her "Mother Weeping-willow," looked all the while like innocent angels who were thinking sorrowfully of the miseries of earth.

Fraundorfer came earlier than was expected. Pia's mother, with Marlene and Relly, had just left the room when a scraping and snuffling and blowing was heard, and the huge mass of flesh and fat that was his body pushed itself across the threshold.

He was like a stove that seems to occupy a disproportionate amount of space. And like a stove he radiated warmth uninterruptedly, endlessly; warmth and good-natured noise; at times, very often indeed, also smoke and soot; that is to say, daring cynicisms, equivocal remarks, and corrosive comments, which horrified well-bred people, and were the reason why, at his approach, children, young girls, and all immature creatures, were hastily taken to a place of safety. Pia, to be sure, by her mere glance and gestures, had gradually tamed him to the point of being careful in her presence. Whenever he was about to say something particularly disreputable she looked at him with wide, amiable eyes, whereupon he would scratch his head, and make a gobbling noise in his throat, and look about him, half embarrassed and half enraged, out of his tiny eyes, and roll his eternal cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

He was quite forty-five years old, and looked like a school-boy afflicted with general elephantiasis. His hair was fair and tightly curled and was bushed at the back of his neck into an artist's mane. He had fat, moist, beardless, negroid lips, a deeply-cleft chin, puffy cheeks, enormous, rectangular ears, and enormous, hairy hands. His movements gave the impression that he had to talk persuasively to his body, as you would talk to a stubborn or lazy horse, before he succeeded in changing his position or taking a step. If he once sat securely in a chair, you felt sure that nothing could pry him out until the house burned down.

In the directories and other official lists he was put down as a scholar by profession. But no one knew exactly what he lived on. He was half gypsy and half hermit. He had once possessed a fortune, but had lost it during the inflation. He owned two houses in town, which now brought him no income; he wrote scholarly articles for journals and reviews, which no one ever read, because, although they were often witty and amusing, they were never popular. He was extra-

ordinarily frugal, utterly careless of luxury, never asked anyone's help, and yet, in spite of the narrowness of his circumstances, seemed able suddenly to raise large sums of money either to satisfy a whim of his own or to help a friend in difficulties.

He had a tiny white dog who was his inseparable companion. He had brought him along to-day. He told a melancholy tale of how he had once checked the dog in the cloak-room of a theatre, and there the poor animal had been so overcome by horror at the numerous human coats and hats that he had been subject to nervous attacks ever since. You had only to look at his little face; disgust and wretchedness were written upon it. And why not? For when you considered what an evil smell men have for dogs, it is not surprising that all those human clothes should have been insufferably disgusting to so delicately organized a creature.

He called the little dog Herr Schmidt. The animal had the mouth and the legs of a guinea-pig. But it cannot be denied that his behaviour was infinitely sedate and discreet. Herr Schmidt hardly ever barked, but only growled gently. Fraundorfer asserted that the dog was a stranger from afar, that his original home was Odessa, whence he was brought westward through many astonishing adventures, and that he had no fondness for his new home. He always spoke to the dog in tender and respectful terms, and vaunted his chastity, and the pure, not to say Christian, character of his life and conversation.

Fraundorfer's relation to his son Nicolas was subject to very varying interpretations. Some asserted that he could not endure him, and had certainly become estranged from him since the young man's irresistible passion for music had become unmistakable. The appearances seemed to confirm this view. Fraundorfer almost always spoke of his son in terms of disesteem, shrugged his shoulders at him, called him, with malicious laughter, his forehead red with anger, a useless

strummer, a sentimentalist and lyrist who had abandoned the ways of his kind. He quarrelled with him about money, about his relations with indifferent people, about a book or the meaning of a word. He insulted him. He made ill-natured jokes, especially in the presence of others, about the youth's timidity, about his unshakable faith in himself and his talent, and refused to take seriously anything that Nicolas either did or said.

There were other people, however, and among these was Laudin, who were of the opinion that all this rage and sarcasm and deprecation was comparable to the trickery by means of which a conjuror, gabbling and gesticulating, tries to divert the attention of the audience from what he is doing. Sudden, unnecessary exaggerations, sudden glances and intonations, however carefully they were guarded and retracted and hushed up, could not be hidden from an acute observer. And yet it was hard to explain the reason for this emphatic quarrelsomeness, this contempt. Were they rooted in an innate dislike of all emotional activity, or did they spring from mere queerness?

Nicolas was the child of a union which had lasted not quite three months. When the lady in question had left Fraundorfer she had done so with the remark that, if one had to, one could live with a fool, or one could live with a miser, and at worst even a misanthropist. But to live with a mad and miserly misanthropist—that was beyond human endurance. Fraundorfer told this anecdote to anyone who would listen. Shortly after giving birth to the child she had brought it to him, and had been heard of no more. Whenever he spoke of her, which was rare, he said dryly that his relations with women constituted that part of his life of which he was ashamed, but that the one who had fooled him most grossly had belonged to the order of infantile egoists with a morbid tendency to slander. Unluckily, she had bluffed him for twenty-four hours. Hence his son. Had he regained his

judgment at the end of twenty-three hours, he might yet have extracted his head from the noose.

One day, during the winter before the war, when rebellion and dissatisfaction were fermenting dangerously among the people, Laudin, on leaving the chambers where he had had a conference with a deputy, found himself in the midst of a crowd of more than three thousand strikers. They were mostly very young men, wild and threatening in proportion to their youth. Boys of sixteen and seventeen were roaring and whistling and throwing stones at the mounted police. In a moment Laudin was in the thick of the crowd, and while trying to make his way through it he witnessed a curious scene. An extraordinarily obese man, caught in the crowd like himself, had become the object of various insults on account of his well-nourished corpulence. A few rabid fellows were about to lay hands on him. Laudin hastened to help the man. But the latter, puffing and blowing mightily, had succeeded in escaping his immediate pursuers, and with astonishing agility had mounted a refuse-bin which happened to be near him. Standing on it, he addressed the crowd somewhat as follows:

"Fellow-citizens, or rather, comrades! Why do you presume to think that fatness is the result of gorging *paté de foie gras* and truffles? Who among you has observed me in my favourite restaurant and has seen me devouring beefsteaks, loins of pork, roast venison and chocolate tarts, instead of eating, with sighs and tears, a lean bit of boiled beef and greens? Let such a one step forth! Let him arise and accuse me! My belly, you will answer? The question is, how I came to have it, and what is its natural history? It is not the belly of a heavy eater; it is a starveling's belly, a belly fed on fasts and on grief—a wholly uncapitalistic belly. For all you know, comrades, pickles are my favourite dish. Perhaps at a time when the latest improvements in popular suffering had not yet reached this land, I was already a victorious supporter

of the slogan: Long live herring and sauerkraut! And, just among ourselves, comrades: Do all the voracious maws in the world sport my roundness of figure? Haven't most of them, if you examine the question closely, a deceptive emaciation, a downy unobtrusiveness? If you had, like myself, made a study of the stomachs and entrails of those classes that grow fat upon the sweat of the people, you would regard my poor belly with affectionate sympathy; for it is an innocent belly, a conscientious belly."

He had been like some caricature of Mark Antony as he stood on the bin with a jovial smile, cigar in mouth, defending his Falstaffian shape with a stentorian voice.

Some of the men grumbled, in the belief that he was making fun of them. But the crowd laughed, and let him go in peace.

Laudin, who had been amused by this scene, accosted the speaker. They walked off together, and met regularly, from that day on, in Fraundorfer's favourite café. Later Fraundorfer came to see Laudin, who occasionally returned his visits, and there arose one of those masculine friendships which are based less upon the communication and exchange of ideas and experiences than upon a half silent but sympathetic harmony of mood, and a certain instinctive well-being of each in the moral atmosphere of the other.

In spite of Fraundorfer's assurance to the contrary, Pia guessed that he had not yet lunched, and ordered the maid to serve him. He devoured considerable quantities of meat, vegetables, salad, and pudding, and drank a bottle of Cham-bertin that had been warmed for him, and now and then, under Pia's silently disapproving eyes, gave little bites to his

dog. Herr Schmidt crouched, modest and tiny, at the enormous feet of his master.

He told them that he had been to the theatre for the sake of seeing a certain actress; rather for the sake of Nickie, who had an extremely high opinion of the actress. Her name was Luise Dercum. She had been imported from Berlin. Personally he didn't think much of these importations from Berlin, but he had gone to see her because Nickie had given him no peace. The boy had evidently known her since last summer. For a long time his every other word had been Dercum. Dercum this and Dercum that. The name itself had made him nervous. Dercum! Didn't that sound exactly like a tonic or a substitute for alcohol? Well, then for weeks the boy had not mentioned this odious name. But this very morning he had suddenly turned up with a ticket for his father. This was her first big part; she was appearing in a new French play. He hadn't felt particularly drawn toward the whole thing. All right then, father, if it doesn't interest you, you needn't go. This hypocritical indifference had annoyed Fraundorfer senior, and had also made him a little curious. As Laudin was aware, he considered curiosity a virtue, the virtue of the discoverer, and since he had long had his suspicion that there was something going on between Nicolas and the aforesaid Dercum, he had pumped up some energy and strolled along to the theatre.

He couldn't deny that the little woman had pleased him. The public, of course, as usual, had far overshot the mark and had been positively noisy in its indecent enthusiasm for what anyone would admit was a pretty little talent for the kind of rôle attempted: a female devil with an angel's soul; a sweet kernel in a bitter fruit; the whole done with a subtle, modern sophistication. His play within the play was furnished by stupid little Nickie. The boy had been pale; the sweat had gathered on his forehead; he had trembled the whole time, and hardly had the curtain finally

fallen when he had rushed off as though he had a sudden bellyache.

Fraundorfer rocked his head from side to side and blinked with his moist vinous eyes, first at Laudin and then at Pia. He seemed to be uncertain of himself, to be trying to find out secretly whether his anecdote had won their approval or not. "By the way, the boy promised to come out here this afternoon," he said; "he seems to have promised Marlene he would play some duets with her. . . ."

"No, Marlene was going to sing something to him," Pia said; "an Italian aria. She's practiced all week with the greatest diligence; the child really has a charming voice. You ought to hear her."

Fraundorfer raised a frightened and protesting hand. "Please," he said, "not I. All singing sounds to me like the scraping of chalk on a blackboard, which is surely the worst of all noises."

The two men retired to the library. Fraundorfer settled himself in an arm-chair, lit a cigar, folded his hands over his belly, and looked comfortably about him. Herr Schmidt had followed him, and now slept at his feet, his little head between his paws.

Laudin walked up and down.

There followed a strange conversation. It sounded like a monologue on the part of Laudin. Fraundorfer's replies were drowsy. Apparently, at least, he seemed to pay very little attention to the words of his friend. He looked slothful, absorbed in the joys of digestion; he puffed blue smoke into the air and bent forward from time to time to address a question to his little dog: "What is your opinion, Herr Schmidt?" Or: "We are not quite clear about that yet, are we, Herr Schmidt?"

Whenever Laudin turned his back, however, he peeped out attentively, and with astonishment, from under his half-closed lids. For what he heard was comparatively new

to him, and it obviously forced him to uncomfortable reflections.

What did Fraundorfer, who set up to be something of a philosopher, think of the problem of personal identity? Laudin asked, and smiled shrewdly from behind his moustache. What did he think of the selfhood of the human being, of the unchangeableness of individual character? What, at bottom, was this thing that was called character, this often heterogeneous combination of qualities which, in their totality and common functioning, constitute the ego, the self? How annoying it was, and at the same time how appalling, to be forced, all one's life long, to represent the same individual self, endlessly to react to the same stimuli in the same manner! It had all the appearance of an imprisonment. You, Friedrich Laudin, are sentenced for fifty or fifty-five or sixty years to be this precise creature and no other; you are sentenced to live in this city and in no other, in this house, in this activity, and you cannot stir your little finger in any way that does not correspond with that aggregate of qualities and conditions which is labelled Friedrich Laudin.

Suppose, for example, that a man were to become tired of his ego—thoroughly and unmitigatedly tired of the despotism of his own character, of this conglomeration of habits, inclinations, preoccupations, idiosyncrasies of speech and of thought. Couldn't one conceive of such a rebellion against oneself? Wasn't it precisely as though an image in a mirror were to take on life and step forth to act on its own initiative? Imagine this case: A physician is thoroughly disgusted with the ever-changing hypotheses of his science; he is sick to death of practising a profession which forces him to conceal the inadequacy of his means, and his own complete scepticism, beneath a delusive assurance; he is weary of the beseeching looks of those who are doomed to death and whom he cannot help, with the questions to which there is no answer, yet which he must pretend to satisfy, with the prescriptions and

methods and rules and prejudices of a profession in which he has become embedded by tacit and mutual agreement, even as a pebble is embedded in a block of ice. Suppose he wants to step out of his own life? The framework of his life holds him fast. If he wants to turn to another calling the discovery awaits him that he hasn't as much skill as a carpenter needs to plane a board. Perhaps he has a family, perhaps he has children. Every free decision is thwarted and all decisive knowledge throttled. To his last hour he must continue what he began in his first—implacably, unchangeably, even though he should go mad.

Nothing in Fraundorfer's face betrayed the fact that his friend's words had made any impression upon him, or that he drew any inference from them. An observer would rather have said that he was bored. If the boredom was assumed it was assumed very skilfully. He stretched himself lazily, and remarked in his careless, colloquial way: "I've always said that the whole damned planet is a failure. This institution called humanity, as far as we can survey it up to date, is a piece of clumsy bungling. One ought really to send in a complaint. But to whom?—that's the question. People will answer, of course: to God. But the only good thing about God is precisely that He doesn't exist. Isn't that your view, too, Herr Schmidt?" He laughed, a brief, sleepy laugh.

Laudin took a book from the shelves, turned over the pages absent-mindedly, and put it back again. All the wisdom of the sages, he continued, never got one far ahead; not even so far that one could loosen one's professional chains to the point of a decent freedom. The teacher was in the same case as the physician; the priest in the same case as the teacher, the lawyer as the priest. In each one of these social domains men erect an ideal of unselfishness. (Ah, Egyd Fraundorfer, do you hear that word? Do you mark how language thinks for us and signalizes our secret griefs?) A wholly hypocritical ideal of unselfishness—yes, wholly so, for every attempt to

embody it in action is penalized by society with its cruellest punishments. What a wretched business it was, for instance, to be the representative of justice in a world in which justice did not exist! Wasn't it a devilishly empty and dishonest business to speak and act in the name of laws which were merely written and had never been tested by experience? It was just as though a man were in the service of a jeweller who sported a handsome sign, and had magnificent pearls and precious stones in his shop window, while in his shop he carried on the business of a hateful usurer. And yet he had sworn an oath, which had been forced from him in ignorance of the true state of affairs, to share in these nefarious dealings. The bitterness of it all! If all the pent-up bitterness could be poured forth the very city would disappear as in a flood.

He paced up and down, up and down, his hands behind his back. Fraundorfer smoked and said nothing. Folds of fat stood out on his forehead. He had evidently lost all desire to interpose his diverting sarcasms. If, by a sudden miracle, a wall becomes transparent, one cannot help being curious as to what is happening behind it.

From the music-room could be heard the hushed tones of Marlene singing.

What more could Laudin have said? What more could he have dared to say? He paced up and down, up and down. He straightened a picture that hung a little crooked on the wall. With his foot he smoothed out an upturned corner of the carpet. He opened a portfolio on the library table, and looked at an etching without really seeing it. Then, his hands behind his back, he resumed his pacing to and fro.

Suddenly he stopped, close to Fraundorfer, and said: "It always hurts me, dear Egyd, when you make fun of your son, as you did just now at table. It always seems to me like a man who would jeer at the fact that an inspired painter had held up to him a purer and more beautiful image of

himself. And why do you do it? Because you have artificially constructed a rigid notion of your own character; not of its reality, but of that character as you believe it to be, and as you believe it impresses others. And this conception of yourself pleases you better and flatters you more than the reality—God knows why. Don't do it, Egyd. Why should you needlessly diminish that young man's value in our eyes? Why try to reduce to fragments what is still a whole? Think, Egyd, these youths of sixteen and eighteen are in reality our creditors, and we are head over ears in their debt. But you know that without my telling you. Who should know what hour the clock of time is striking, if not a man like yourself? If I had a son like that I would try to insinuate myself into his friendship as though he were a king, and appeal to his imagination as though he were a woman. A son is a guide into the land of the future. We who presume to teach succeed only in giving crutches to those who can fly. Daughters must be protected; at fifteen they're complete human beings over whom we have no power. One fine day an unknown man appears and takes possession of them, and the most sensible thing we can do is cheerfully to consent to that outrage. My little Hubert is still in his cradle, and what the future holds for him no one can yet tell. But you have a young eagle in your nest, and you act as though he were a jackdaw. And all for the sake of a pet trick of psychical juggling."

Fraundorfer looked at Laudin with dull irony. But almost immediately he gazed at the floor again. He smacked his lips in satisfaction, but tried at the same time to look morose. And all this made a curious impression, as though for a moment he had feared that his friend had suspected his true inwardness, had at once dismissed this fear as groundless, and was silently amused by it.

"Splendid, splendid," he squawked in his throat; "a post-prandial sermon, mitigated by the opulence of the preceding meal. Splendid! You're heaping golden words upon my head.

Or should I have said, coals of fire?" He laughed resonantly as Laudin turned away in irritation, and apologized. It interested him, oh, it interested him enormously, Laudin's passionate partisanship of youth. That a man like Friedrich Laudin, whom one had every right to regard as a well-tested observer of the world and of men—when a man like that decisively entered the ranks of the optimists, it certainly was startling. Psychical juggling? No. He, Fraundorfer, could make nothing of this aforesaid younger generation. To him it seemed the very geometrical point of confusion, of the darkening of counsel, of foolish vanities and vain pretences. The average young people of to-day, and probably of all ages, were as inconceivably stupid in their judgment of life as they were impudent in their self-assurance and incapable of self-control. Why present them with a halo? In his shop there were no halos. Before the beginning of his premature old age he had got rid of them all at reduced prices.

Since Laudin was taking so warm and unselfish an interest in Nickie's ways and errors, it might interest him to know that he had found a photograph of Luise Dercum on his son's desk, and had put it in his pocket. He had really done that out of annoyance. The creature gazed out into the world with such a lost, romantic look, as though she wouldn't hurt a fly. To-night, when he got home, he'd put the thing back in its place. Otherwise the boy might think that he was being mysteriously persecuted. Well, he would like Laudin to exercise his incorruptible spiritual penetration on this face, remembering all the while, of course, that he had the picture of a play-actress before him. Unless he made the appropriate deductions he naturally would make a fool of himself.

Fraundorfer rummaged in his coat pocket and produced, first a few bank-notes, then a piece of chocolate, to which breadcrumbs were adhering, then a few cigar-stumps, and finally the photograph, which he handed to Laudin, and which bore visible traces of having passed through his pocket.

With a smile, Laudin blew the dust, ashes, and tobacco from the photograph, and gazed at it. His expression grew serious. He dropped his hand, raised it again, and looked more closely. "I must confess"—his manner was hesitant and strangely thoughtful—"that this is really a face of indescribable, of quite astonishing truth and innocence."

Fraundorfer grunted. He was obviously deriding his friend's remark. Laudin returned the photograph, and he restored it to its former unclean receptacle.

13

When Marlene had finished the aria she stood leaning against the piano, pale and tremulous, and looked at Nicolas. He let his fingers rest upon the keys, and did not speak. Absently he gazed at the keyboard, as though he had heard not a note of her singing, as though it were not he who had accompanied her, but some other into whose place he had accidentally slipped.

Marlene could not but believe that he had not liked her singing. Her eyes filled with tears, which she strove bravely to conceal. She went over to the sofa, on which Relly and Laura were sitting, and said, with forced indifference, "I knew it wouldn't amount to anything to-day. It's my bad day, anyhow."

Energetically Relly shook her head, and declared loudly Marlene had never sung so well. Laura, who was unmusical, consoled Marlene in the manner of a girl who, well disposed as she may be toward her friend, can yet endure that friend's failure without pain. Laura Arndt was very beautiful, and tall, and well developed for her age. Yet she was a little ungainly in bearing and gesture, and so she was constantly falling into a state of tormenting embarrassment concerning herself, her body, her speech, or her silence.

In the meantime Nicolas Fraundorfer had roused himself from his state of unnatural torpor. He jumped up, went over to Marlene, took both her hands in his, and said cordially: "Do forgive me, Marlene, if I seemed not to be attending. But it was only at the very last, and I have so much to bother me, and my head aches frightfully sometimes. Relly is quite right. You really surpassed yourself to-day. There is something very lovely about your voice, something very genuine. If you are careful of it, and especially if you don't strain the high notes, you are sure to go far."

Marlene looked at him incredulously. But she saw that his face was sincere, and she at once glowed with gratitude. To Relly, however, Marlene's singing was perfection, and though she was as happy in the young man's praise as if it had been given to herself, she thought it far too tepid. This could be seen from the disappointment in her face.

"I don't want to play any more," said Nicolas, and closed the piano. "I'd much rather we talked. Anyhow, I have to go soon. And rather than talk, even, I would like to read you something. I would like to read some beautiful poetry. You must have some here."

His delicate, passionate features were slightly marred by the thick lenses that his eyes required. His skin was pale, almost white; the beardless lips of his rather wide mouth were compressed, like those of most musicians. His dark hair, smoothed across the crown of his head, drooped in a long wave over his right temple and part of his translucent forehead. He was tall and slender, and in his movements and gestures was alternately vivacious and inhibited. He bore so little resemblance to his father that strangers, seeing them together, never suspected that there was any kinship between them.

Since he had entered the room to-day his eyes and his bearing had been full of restlessness. Marlene had felt this from the first, and so she had been restless herself, but she managed to conceal her feelings under an equable cheerfulness.

Laura Arndt, who admired Marlene no less than Relly herself, now glanced at Nicolas and now at her friend, and seemed fearfully and almost humbly trying to discover whether there was anything between the two of which she was ignorant. Although she was greatly inferior to Marlene in the vigilance and acuteness of her observation, she could not help perceiving how disturbed Nicolas was, how unstable was his mood, how, either in sudden nervousness, or as though to drive away some tormenting thought, he would grasp his forehead and hear nothing of what was said to him.

Later, when the two sisters were alone, it pleased Marlene to pour out the vials of her wrath over the trio of female adorers. She felt it to be in the highest degree ridiculous that they were all three courting the favour of a young man whose heart was probably far above the advances of three bread-and-butter misses. She never spared herself when she considered that she had good reason to be dissatisfied with her behaviour. But Relly remarked dryly that she didn't consider herself included in any trio of that sort. As far as the behaviour of Marlene and Laura was concerned, she was quite ready to share her sister's opinion.

At the present moment, however, she too was delighted with Nicolas's proposal. On the table lay a volume of the tales of Stifter. He took it up and turned the pages. Then he closed the book again, and recited from memory the poem, "The Castle of the Lost," by Konrad Ferdinand Meyer.

"Beautiful, but melancholy," said Relly, with her incorruptible objectivity.

Nicolas stroked her hair. He still treated her as though she were a child. The two other girls looked at her contemptuously. Again Nicolas opened the volume by Stifter, and read, as naturally and yet as broodingly as he had recited the poem: "The Tourmaline is dark, and what shall here be told is dark also. . . ."

Marlene nodded. She knew every word of the story.

But he had not yet read three pages when he lost patience, and put the book aside, and sat down at the piano, and began to improvise. What he played lacked neither passion nor inspiration, but was a little formless. He sang to his playing, in a hoarse voice, and gradually subdued the passionate expression to an elegiac melancholy which, in its turn, melted into a dull, staccato pianissimo.

He jumped up with a laugh and declared that he must hurry off.

"Too bad," Laura sighed.

What he had done was all false and stupid, he said, too dreadfully stupid! Marlene shook her head and gave him her hand, which he pressed so hard that she cried out in pain.

As he was approaching the door, Pia entered the room. His appearance made her gaze at him in surprise. After he had courteously answered her few simple questions, he took leave of her too. On the threshold he remembered that he had not shaken hands with either Relly or Laura, and quickly returned for a moment.

14

The next morning, about nine o'clock, just as Laudin was getting ready to drive to town, a message came from one of Egyd Fraundorfer's tenants (for he himself had no telephone) begging Dr. Laudin to come and see Dr. Fraundorfer at once. Laudin had a case in court, and was obliged to attend. Since, moreover, he suspected nothing amiss, and attributed the telephone call to one of Fraundorfer's sudden whims, he got a servant to reply that he would like Fraundorfer to call him up again at his office, about noon. Until then he would be uninterruptedly occupied.

At eleven o'clock Pia rang him up at the office. He was taken aback by the very sound of her voice. She begged him

not to lose a moment, but to drive out to Fraundorfer's flat, where she herself was waiting. What, in Heaven's name, had happened? Laudin asked. She hesitated. There was a pause. In barely audible tones she then told him that Nicolas had committed suicide during the night. With a trembling hand Laudin hung up the receiver.

He had let his chauffeur go for two hours. He sent for a taxi. Fifteen minutes later he climbed up the four flights of stairs to Fraundorfer's flat. The building was one that had gone to wrack and ruin in every respect, a huge barrack in an obscure street. On the landing of the third story stood a small group of people whispering to one another. On the fourth floor stood Pia, near the door of the flat. From within could be heard the enraged voice of Fraundorfer; he was violently quarrelling with someone.

"It is a good thing that you have come," said Pia, with pallid lips. "I seem to be helpless and useless here."

Laudin's face assumed a questioning look; he could not understand the brawling within.

"I don't understand it either," said Pia, shrugging her shoulders and suppressing a sob. "He is scolding the hall porter on account of some damage done by the wind while the body of his son lies in the next room. I don't understand it."

She pressed Laudin's hand and went down the stairs. He entered the flat. In the middle of the living-room, which was cold and disorderly, stood Egyd Fraundorfer, in a spotted coat that had once been brown. His hair stood up wildly, his face was distorted with rage, and he roared, as though beside himself, at the porter, who stood before him, bowed but maliciously blinking, turning his cap about in his hands, letting the storm sweep over him. It appeared that an imperfectly-fastened window had been lifted from its hinges by the wind the night before and had crashed into the yard. The porter and his wife took care of Fraundorfer's house for him.

Laudin knew his friend well enough to recognize at a

glance the true character of this outburst. He had scarcely entered the room when Fraundorfer fell silent, and looked at him a little strangely, a little surprisedly, with a contortion of the lips that might have been taken for a smile. And now Laudin became aware of the terribly ravaged look on Fraundorfer's face. From his face one might have thought the man had been in a fight; there was a long, bloody scratch on his forehead above the left eyebrow.

The porter slunk out. The little dog, which had been hidden behind the stove, came out and growled softly. "That's right, Herr Schmidt," Fraundorfer murmured breathlessly, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, "don't ever let that brute in human form cross my threshold again, Herr Schmidt." Then he turned at once to Laudin and said, with the strange beginning of a laugh that trailed off into something confused and wild and inarticulate: "Have you been in there? Have you seen him? Go and look at him. All the official representatives of society have been there—the doctor, the undertaker, the coroner's officer. We have had many callers, Herr Schmidt, disagreeable callers. But it was nice of Pia to come. Unluckily we couldn't pay her the attention which was her due. Go in there, Laudin, and look at him. . . ." He would have gone on talking thus indefinitely if Laudin had not laid a hand on his shoulder. At that he fell silent and hung his head. Then he turned away, and with heavy steps walked into his bedroom.

Nicolas's room adjoined the living-room on the other side. Its windows were wide open and afforded a view of courtyard, walls, and windows, gray under a foggy sky. On the bed lay the body of the young man, covered to the chin with a sheet. On his right temple, over which a lock of hair fell, Laudin saw a tiny, red, round spot. There the bullet had pierced the translucent forehead. On the face was a winning peace, a pleasant and gentle restfulness. The white of the cheeks showed already a bluish tinge; about the nose were traces of

the rapid work of death. But the fact that the spectacles had been removed gave to the frail, delicate, not yet wholly formed features a solemn and as it were indestructible loveliness.

Laudin stood there erect, without moving, his hat in his hands. From all the courtyards in the neighbourhood one could hear the chattering of the maid-servants, the rattle of dishes, the splashing of water on the stones. In a loud voice Laudin uttered one word: "Why?"

This "why" remained standing before him like a pillar, cleaving the distant fog, and toward that pillar he was destined to wander, involuntarily and almost unconsciously.

15

When he rejoined Fraundorfer he found his friend lying on a sofa. His room was just as disorderly and unhomelike and cold as the others. It was half bedroom and half study. The wide, old-fashioned, green rep sofa evidently served as a bed by night. On the walls were a couple of old family portraits, two crossed fencing-foils under a university corps cap, a half-ragged Oriental rug, a few Chinese masks, and a book-case, and from the top of a wooden chest of drawers grinned the skull of a little dog. A tea-set, wine and beer bottles, and plates with remnants of food stood on the desk, the table, and even the floor. Scattered everywhere were garments, sheets of manuscript, and empty cigar-boxes.

Laudin sat down on a chair with a torn seat.

Fraundorfer, his mouth contorted, pointed to a newspaper which he pretended to have read. "It says in that paper that an American prophet has foretold that Europe will be swallowed by the ocean in 1945. Rather a hopeful outlook. Couldn't the man petition certain higher authorities to arrange for the catastrophe to come a little earlier, so that we too might profit by it? Don't you think so?"

"Let be, Egyd," said Laudin seriously. "Why this farce? We are alone, you know."

Fraundorfer was silent and turned his face to the wall. There was a long silence.

"When did it happen?" Laudin asked finally.

Fraundorfer replied that he did not know. He still kept his face to the wall. At a quarter to nine the porter's wife had rushed into his room. She had taken Nicolas's breakfast to him, as she did daily. The coroner had declared that death must have occurred between four and five hours previously. He himself had heard nothing. Perhaps he had slept more soundly than usual. But no one else in the house had heard anything either.

Hadn't Nicolas left a letter behind? Laudin asked.—No, none.—Or had Egyd found notes of any sort?—No.—Was there any basis of inquiry to be deduced from the young man's last conversations, or was his manner in any way peculiar?—No.—Since noon yesterday, when they had gone to the theatre together, the father and son had not spoken to one another.—But had not Fraundorfer, in spite of that, his own theory concerning the motive of the deed?—No, except that perhaps his passion for the play-actress had gone to the boy's head. He was quite capable of these emotional excesses.

Again there was a long silence.

Then Fraundorfer began to complain that for hours he had had the most wretched pain in his chest. Would Laudin bring him the woollen shawl that hung over his desk chair yonder? Laudin fetched the shawl and, as he spread it over his friend, and tucked it in on either side, Fraundorfer's hands suddenly grasped his own with an agonized strength, and held them as in a vice. Laudin did not stir. He looked at Fraundorfer. The latter had closed his eyes, and his teeth were chattering.

But half a minute later he assumed his usual expression of morose unconcern. And he confided a very strange fact to his friend. First, he asked whether Laudin had left the body

covered. Or had he lifted the sheet just a little? Laudin replied that he had not done so. Fraundorfer explained that on one shoulder, between the upper arm and the collarbone, there was a wound caused by a burn, a wound that had barely begun to heal. It could not be more than four or five days old. What, he asked, could be the significance of that? A wound the size of a man's thumb, burned deep into the flesh.

Hesitatingly Laudin suggested that it must have been an accidental injury.

Fraundorfer was almost angry. How the deuce, he wanted to know, could the boy have burned his shoulder? They ought to find out about that wound. Perhaps the Dercum woman could give some information. Why should she know? Well, if the boy had had an affair with her, she ought to know. Didn't Laudin think so?

It was hardly to be assumed that there had been an affair between Nicolas and Fräulein Dercum, Laudin replied. Doubtless the photograph of the actress was visible to his inner eye; doubtless he saw again that face, "of astonishing truth and innocence," as he had described it the day before. No, he didn't think that was likely. Fraundorfer fell silent; he gnawed at his fingernails. Suddenly he laughed—a long, thunderous, malevolent, convulsive laugh. Laudin started. He did not attempt to check this laughter, as of a man half-maddened by insupportable pain. His lips twitched.

Then there was another silence; and again Fraundorfer gnawed his nails, while Laudin stared at the wall.

Just as he was about to leave, promising to return that evening, a woman appeared whom Pia had found and sent hither to manage Fraundorfer's household for the present. The woman's name was Pauline Blum, and she seemed agreeable and unobtrusive. Fraundorfer made no objection. Then other people arrived—friends and acquaintances who had heard of the catastrophe.

On the day of the funeral Marlene did not get home until six in the evening. She went at once to her room, where she found Relly sitting at the table busy with her home-work. Marlene sat down facing her, supporting her head with her hand. She was pale, and her eyes were rather red.

"How is Laura?" Relly inquired.

"She cries and cries and cries!" Marlene exclaimed. "For two mortal hours I have tried to console her. She won't listen, and goes on crying. Frau Arndt has telephoned for the doctor."

Relly elaborately blew her nose, shook her head, and went on writing.

"The Castle of the Lost," whispered Marlene.

And Relly said: "Marlene, don't." She looked about her and shivered.

They scarcely ate; they scarcely slept. Their conversation had but a single theme. They saw nothing but that beautiful face in the rigidity of death, more beautiful in death, since they did not yet know what death meant. They recalled his last words and how he had stopped at the door, and had come back once more to shake hands with Relly and Laura.

Not only did they not know death, they could not believe in it. It seemed to them to partake of the nature of a pretence or a game. They dreamed of a secret flight and a secret re-appearance after long and incredibly haunting years. They could not quell the pain of that leave-taking; they could not withdraw themselves from the tormenting riddle of that deed.

They listened to all the guesses which were ventured in every quarter. They read all the reports in the newspapers. They questioned one another in dread, and yet they shrank from the thought of any revealing word. The event was discussed at school, and more or less mysteriously the name of

the actress was mentioned. There were those who pretended to know that other men had gone to their death or to their ruin for the sake of that woman. There was a young girl in the senior class, more experienced than the others, and interested in life, who was able to tell them that a very wealthy and highly respected manufacturer, a certain Consul Altacher, whom her parents knew very well, had abandoned his wife and three children for the sake of the actress.

The girls who discussed the case attributed no shadow of guilt to anyone involved. The young generation bowed with a gentle awe, as before an heroic tale. The time had gone by when adolescents derived their judgments concerning the great and ultimate sacrifices of passion from the examples of a stale and sterile literature. This was a new period. Life bore its own norms within itself, and spoke directly to the soul, without a distorting intermediary. They had eyes, they had senses, and they used these in spite of outworn precepts.

By a tacit agreement the sisters dedicated themselves to the memory of the friend whom they had loved. In order to speak of him they had to be sure that they were alone, and even then Relly locked the door. They recalled the characteristics in which he differed from other people; they remembered conversations that they had had with him, and even certain quaint and amusing habits of his—his way of cracking his knuckles, the little defect of speech, like a heaviness of the tongue, which had been more noticeable on some days than on others.

It would happen, during the exchange of these recollections, that they would suddenly laugh quite heartily. "Do you remember how silly he used to look when he took off his glasses and polished them with his handkerchief?" Relly would ask. And Marlene would add merrily: "And how he tried to put his handkerchief on his nose, instead of his glasses. . . ." And they laughed together heartily.

Yet in the night, when the light was extinguished, Relly

slipped into her sister's bed and for hours, fearful and silent, they lay in each other's arms.

There was no denying that Relly showed a heightened sensibility toward the common impressions of daily life. A loud noise would make her wince. She changed colour often; she was startled if anyone called her. She was afraid of passing through a dark room, and had causeless attacks of anger or of depression.

Marlene became visibly more reserved and, in her association with her fellows as well as with adults, more watchful and withdrawn. Even before this Pia had had occasion gently but firmly to resist her daughter's premature desire for independence. It was now a question of struggling with a constant inner rebellion which offered no direct point for attack, and to which it seemed impossible to offer any resistance, or at least any rational and wholesome resistance. Toward the end of the week Marlene again returned home very late. And when Pia asked her why she had stayed out so long, she replied that she and Laura had taken a long walk, and had not been able to pay any attention to the passing of time. Pia pointed out that she couldn't accept this excuse, if for no other reason than because it was neither safe nor proper for the two girls to gad about alone at so late an hour. Perhaps it was evoked by this ill-considered expression: gad about; perhaps she felt that Pia regretted having used it; at all events, Marlene's reply was surprising in its arrogant harshness: "I'm not concerned whether anything is approved of or not," she said. "Anyhow, each of us was taking care of the other."

"Marlene!" Relly cried, shocked and indignant.

Marlene shrugged her shoulders, and her lovely mouth was both harsh and stubborn. Pia gazed at her. Softly she asked: "Would you answer your father in the same way if he had asked you to account for your lateness?"

"Assuming that he would take any interest in how I spend

my time—I would,” Marlene replied. “The question would then arise whether we could come to an understanding with one another.”

Pia was amazed. “Then you demand that he should come to an understanding with you? Hasn’t he the right to exact obedience?”

“No such right exists,” Marlene said. She was very pale, and her lids were half-closed. “If he chooses to command, I must obey. But such obedience is evil and useless. What does he know about me?”

Pia looked at her and said nothing.

“What does he know about me?” Marlene repeated more urgently, and clenched her right hand without raising her eyes.

Pia left the room.

“Marlene, how could you?” Relly whispered in a hurt tone.

Marlene tore off her coat, hat and gloves, threw them onto the bed, and began to sob unrestrainedly. Relly, who was frightened, bent over her, and stroked her head, and tried to soothe her with many tender words. “You can’t make anything clear to them,” Marlene sobbed into her pillows; “it is as though they had never felt any pain, as though they had no soul. They know nothing and understand nothing. . . .”

Pia heard all this. She had stopped outside the door, not to listen, but in an access of sorrowful reflection. She turned and went back into the room. She requested Relly to leave her alone with Marlene, and Relly obeyed with a glance which was meant both to encourage and to thank her mother.

“Get up, Marlene, and come here,” said Pia, without any attempt to hide her helplessness.

Marlene rose and approached the table. “Don’t tell me I’ve been in the wrong, mother. I know it,” Marlene whispered, with melancholy archness.

“Well, Marlene . . . do you think it suffices to admit your fault? Isn’t that a cheap way of being relieved of responsibility?”

But it was clear at once that Marlene felt no need of any such relief. She thought it her duty to admit that she had committed an offence against the mere forms of acceptable behaviour. Pia didn't think that this reached the root of the matter, although she was more than willing to be indulgent, seeing how things were with the girl, and that any sort of solemn inquisition was alien to her own character.

Marlene, on the contrary, was passionately eager to "have it out." She was in no mood to admit any sort of guilt, or to appear crushed, as perhaps her mother expected her to be. She herself wanted to be the accuser, and to pour out all that was in her heart. But for her, too, language was so difficult, and the out-worn words were so dangerous to handle. She said that she didn't feel well, and that she often felt the atmosphere of her home to be oppressive. Could she speak more clearly? However considerably she tried to word her complaint, she knew that it must wound her mother. It was useless to try to allay the hurt by an accompanying look or gesture. A strange situation: the unsuspecting mother—the child full of perceptions of truths that had not yet come into being; the woman imprisoned in dead things; the girl who had knowledge of the unworthiness and the weight of these things, who pointed hesitantly to her father as to a mysterious, unrecognizable, and strangely isolated figure, and, by this act, evoked a disquietude, and even a first flicker of fear in the heart of the mother and wife. Marlene, becoming aware of what she had done, tried with all possible skill to mitigate and retract what she had said. No, she hadn't meant precisely that . . . it wasn't to be understood like that . . . and so on, and so on. Sadly she hung her head, despairing of the possibility of human communication.

But there was still another subject that engrossed her: that of education, its feebleness and its outmoded quality. This word she repeated with emphasis: outmoded. Oh, she wasn't rebelling against compulsion, as such; she could conceive of

compulsion being helpful; but against superfluous compulsion, that had its origin in mere habit and the desire for ease. "Is it a crime if one wants to escape what is false and wrong-headed in order to avoid unnecessary suffering?" Her demeanour was that of a tribune of the people. And then she came to what she boldly characterized as downright dishonesty: "Because my parents give me food and clothing and care and a home, must I, in exchange, barter my liberty and my truth? Isn't that a trade that exploits my weakness and my dependence? Am I less a human being, a creature of will and knowledge, because I am compelled to submit to a biological necessity?"

Happily, this grandiloquent tirade was not without a tinge of self-irony. Without it, Pia would have been hopelessly embarrassed. Half vexed and half ironical, she looked into her daughter's glowing face. "I can't compete with you, Marlene," she admitted with a sigh. "I suppose I should be ashamed, but you silence me with your eloquence. Tell me precisely what you're driving at. What's to be done? What's to be changed?"

"Oh, a great deal," Marlene cried, "a great deal ought to be changed and ought to be done!" But it just couldn't be discussed; words had a way of consuming one another. One always heard it said, even by clever people: things are as they are, and human nature is what it is, and there is nothing to be done about it. But if that were true one would perish of the dreariness of it all. "Are you really convinced of that, mother? Are you thoroughly convinced that everything must be as it is? For instance, frankly, mother, do you believe that Nicolas had to die? That there was no way of preventing it? That there was no one in the world who could have kept him from it?"

"But who and how, Marlene?" Pia asked, hesitating.

"I can't tell you, mother." Frightened at herself, and with trembling lips, Marlene sought escape in evasions. "Only

everything seems so, so—extremely cruel. Did his father really know him? A human being like Nicolas—he isn't so easy to decipher. Did his father ever take pains to do so? Or did he really know nothing about him? It may be that he never even reflected about him. And that is a terrible thought, mother, so terrible that it's hardly bearable. Father says that Doctor Fraundorfer loved his son. I can't tell. But what do you think? And if he did, was it really love? For if it was that, then it is clear that love is not enough. There must be something more and different that grasps us and controls us—compulsion, too, oh, yes, but a wonderful compulsion, one that grows out of a reality! Do you understand me, mother. Do try to understand!"

Reality! This recurrent word! It seemed to be a magic formula on the lips of this girl of fifteen. What did it reveal, or what was it meant to prophesy? Pia was silent and perplexed. It was the passionate grief and rebellion in Marlene's words that everwhelmed her, as much as a certain element of truth in it—a truth that coincided with some dark presage of her own.

"And what are we to do, my child?" she asked helplessly.

"Dear mother!" was all that Marlene answered. The girl's smile was almost compassionate, as though the two had exchanged the natural rôles which the years had assigned to them. Marlene put her arms round Pia's neck, and kissed her cheek, and wept again, but now with a release from her former tension.

Laudin rose and laid the documents aside. They related to a new case which had just been begun. They were docketed with the name of Altacher. An hour ago Frau Altacher had been in consultation with him. It was a sombre record of family

life that she had brought to his attention. Fragmentary up to this point, for shame and grief had hardly allowed her to speak. She had come for his advice. But he had said very little, being at once aware of her profound indecision. Experience had taught him that people who demand counsel fear nothing so much as being shown the right way. Finally, she had promised to send him a written account.

She too had spoken the name of Luise Dercum. In the rôle of instigator? Or seducer? Of villain in the play? Some such accusation emerged from the tentative hints thrown out by Constance Altacher. But Laudin never formed an opinion without sufficient proof.

He was rather exhausted. It was past seven-thirty. He rose, and was about to go. At that moment he was informed that Frau Brigitte Hartmann was asking for an interview. A tormented look appeared upon his face. "Quite impossible," he said. Then, after a moment's reflection: "Show the lady in."

She was dressed in citified clothes. She was wearing new gray gloves, but her shoes were broad and countrified. Laudin courteously asked her to be seated. She seemed to be depressed, and at the same time annoyed with herself for being so. From the first moment she watched the lawyer as though he were a wild beast whom she had determined to tame. Her glance was piercing and restless. She said that she had been on the way to her own lawyer, but had finally determined first to consult Dr. Laudin. She had intentionally let a whole week pass; all sorts of thoughts had gone through her head. She could tell him at once that she looked forward to any legal action with the utmost composure; she had a clean conscience, and she defied anybody to say more than that. In the meantime, however, she had sent the lawyer packing whom she had consulted during Hartmann's lifetime. The man's fees had been, to say the least, excessive. How was she to get hold of so much money? It would be like robbing her own children. Children were expensive these days, especially if you wanted to give

them a decent education, which was surely a mother's duty. She was sure that Dr. Laudin was a reasonable man, and would be considerate in this respect also, especially seeing that she had come in a spirit of good will, ready to make a decent arrangement with that Lanz woman, provided always, of course, that the woman's demands, which could certainly be discussed, remained within proper limits.

She talked on confusedly, though she had obviously considered beforehand what she would say. Her words were a tissue of all manner of slyly concealed intentions, a conflict of avarice and prudence, of lies and terror, of respect for the mysterious apparatus of the law and a determination to slip craftily through its meshes, of willingness to compromise and immediate retraction until the compromise sank to zero. She had a naïve trick of seeming to put herself wholly at the disposal of her adversary's lawyer, in order to obtain information for nothing, or cheaply, and perhaps even to worm herself into his good graces and induce him involuntarily to protect her against the enemy at her back.

Undoubtedly she was impelled, too, by a superstitious respect for the knowledge of this man, to whom she ascribed something like omniscience because he saw through her. Probably a consciousness of guilt had awakened in her only at the moment when he had first confronted her. In her flickering eyes there was an expression that told of sleepless nights, of a morbid desire to confess, if only half-heartedly and untruthfully. Such a confession, she evidently believed, would give her certain advantages as well as a possible appearance of justification. Women of her type have little opportunity to speak of themselves or their lives; when once they do so all dams are swept away, and they lay bare all things, to the point of shamelessness.

Laudin was prepared for this. He had merely to listen. She had guessed that he must first find out how far her willingness to make a settlement with his client went, so that he might

submit her proposals to the latter, but she seemed unable to wait; she was aching to talk about all that had accumulated within her; the wrong she had suffered, the misunderstandings to which she had been subjected, the sacrifices she had made—of the whole martyrdom of her union with Hartmann.

He had not respected her. That had been enough to spoil everything from the outset. He had never known what was due to a woman. He had been a weakling through and through. Deaf and dumb he had gone through life, had considered no one, had trusted no one but himself to do anything. It had never occurred to him that a human being might want to be cheerful, or go out into society, or enjoy a few simple pleasures. He brooded and complained all day long, year in and year out. It was enough to make anyone go to pieces and lose courage. He had been no good in any respect. Didn't even our holy religion command man and woman to dwell together? Wasn't it written down in the Bible: be fruitful and multiply? But from the very beginning it had been a matter of torment and persuasion with him. Later she had consented to do without. But she had been a young woman when he had married her; hadn't human nature any rights? Much he had cared! If he had a warm room, a hot meal, a warm bed, he didn't look any farther. But such a situation injects a poison into the soul. And the poison comes out, like boils. No self-respecting woman wants to beg for what is her due. A woman has her own pride. But you can't jest with God, nor with the devil, who sits in each man's breast.

"Do you know what time is, Doctor?" she continued convulsively, with increasing haste. "Time is the flail that beats us down. We get no farther in our own souls nor in our relations to each other; each makes life bitter for the other; time tears our souls into shreds. If only he had spoken out before the children came! No one forbade him, you know. I would have been the last one to stay where I wasn't wanted. I know what I owe myself. My father was a Government

inspector. But as it was? Oh, no! One fine day he says: 'Things can come to no good between us.' Thank you, no! Did you pick me up on the roadside? I was an honest virgin when the minister blessed us; I thought I had builded my house on a rock. Now I'm to be thrown out, eh? Well, that was like pouring oil on to fire. Nine o'clock in the morning, and my fine husband was gone. Didn't show up again until nine o'clock at night. Then I was worn out and ready to go to bed. For I did all the work and took care of the house and the farm. He had furnished himself a bedroom of his own in the attic, which is in itself an offence against good morals. You could hear him dragging himself upstairs. You could hear him stamping up and down. I used to jump up and cry out: 'The children are asleep, remember!' Then there'd be quiet for a while. Then it would start again—tramp, tramp, tramp. Then he would come down to my door and call: 'Brigitte!'—'What's the matter?'—'I want to talk to you.'—Very well, we would talk. I'd be half dead for sleep; it didn't matter. He would sit down on a chair and begin to talk. And he would begin from the beginning of things, and work up to his present unhappiness and wretchedness. How I had done this thing wrong, and mismanaged the other; for instance, he'd ask me to remember what happened once when my late brother-in-law was visiting us. Well, I couldn't remember. You can't remember every rotten trifle. He wouldn't stop. He said that I had said so and so, and so and so, or that if I had said it differently, everything would have been different right along. Naturally, my patience gave out, and I let fly at him. Then he said: 'Look at you now; this shows what you are, and how it's hell to live with a woman like you.' And so it went on, night after night, all the seven days of the week, and all the weeks of the year. Sometimes it went on to eleven o'clock and sometimes to midnight, and sometimes as late as two in the morning. And like other people I have only two arms and two legs and one head, God help us all, and the upshot of it all each

time was: Divorce me! But why should I, I'd like to know? Divorce me, he said, bring a suit against me. But why? Why should I have an evil reputation? A divorced woman—no, thank you! But, by and by, if you torment and vex a human being long enough, you can get them to consent to anything. And a day comes when you almost take your two boys in your arms and get ready to plunge into the river. And another day you get hold of the old shotgun, in order to shoot everybody, and last of all yourself. But he catches you at it. He's behind you day and night. Rotten pretence, he says. Oh, ho, is it? I took some splinters of glass one day and cut open my veins before his very eyes, and everything swam in blood. Pretence, eh? You can see the scars to this day. Here they are. Then he cried: 'I'm going to America; I've finished! Is a man a slave for life because he's married?'—Oh, ho! I told him, marriage was no joke; he ought to have thought it over beforehand. But anyhow, being a good-natured woman, and because I myself had no rest or peace any more, and nothing but confusion in my head, I went to a lawyer. But I just couldn't; I couldn't bring myself to it. What is a woman without her man? A poor creature for all the world to jeer at. God had punished me enough. So there I sat alone with the children, when at last he went away with his woman. And the neighbours gossiped and gossiped. All the evil tongues in the village wagged. You know how everybody looks into his neighbour's windows in a place like that. But I'm coming to the will, Doctor. Don't worry. And I'll tell you the truth, the honest, sacred truth. And if one word is a lie, may my eyes wither in my head and my children never see a happy day again. Well, it was the night of October 17th, the very night during which Hartmann died. You see from this coincidence that I can't be mistaken. I woke up about three o'clock. It was the very hour of his death. I found that out later. And my heart seemed to beat up into my very throat, and something seemed to be moving in the room. I

asked: 'Who's there?' Suddenly Hartmann stood beside my bed; Hartmann just as he used to be. And I tried to ask him where he came from and what he wanted. But my throat was like leather and I couldn't utter a sound. And so in my mind I just sent up a little prayer to my patron saint, because I saw now that it was not the living Hartmann, but his ghost. He beckoned to me and I got up, and again he beckoned me to follow him. And he went on into the upstairs room, and I behind him, and when we got upstairs he pointed to the desk and to the locked drawer. He touched the drawer and it flew open. And on the top was lying a piece of paper, and he pointed to it and said: 'Get rid of it, Brigitte; I've sinned against you and the children; what is mine is yours, and man and wife are one flesh.' And that's the way it was, Doctor, and I don't know to this day what the paper was. How can I tell whether there was a will or not? Next day there was nothing to be found. I've seen nothing and touched nothing."

Suddenly she flung herself on her knees and grasped Laudin's hand before he could resist, and drew it to her lips. She cried out in a high, shrill voice: "Have pity on me, Doctor! I'm a lost creature without any reliance on anyone in life! I've done no wrong, and things have come upon me!" But when she saw his rigid expression, which betrayed none of the emotions that she had hoped to evoke, she grasped his hand again, and added, almost whiningly, that on her soul and honour she knew nothing of the will, and had never seen it, but that if he wanted her to she would search through the whole house again, and look into every room and closet and cupboard and wardrobe, only she begged him not to think bad things of her. . . .

In this ugly room, with its ugly furnishings and its padded doors, with its hundreds of legal documents, and its shelves, reaching to the ceiling, packed with folios and law books and the decisions of many courts—in this room the catharsis of innumerable human fates had been accomplished; here

countless sombre records had become vocal, records of suffering and crime, confessions dictated by hatred and love, by vengeance and remorse. But this room had probably never before witnessed a scene in which the contrary elements of human nature had blended into so murky a confusion—despair and deceit, cunning and hysteria, exorbitant passion and peasant canniness, theatrical grief and sincere sorrow, humility and rage, hypocrisy and an aching conscience.

Laudin kept a little bottle of salts of lavender on his table. He took it up and sniffed at it. "Get up, Frau Hartmann," he said coldly. "All that you say has no bearing on the case, apart from the expression of your willingness, under certain circumstances—and I emphasize this, for we seem to have got no farther—to come to an amicable agreement with Caroline Lanz. You might tell me how much money your husband actually left."

Brigitte Hartmann got up. "I think it's in the neighbourhood of eighty millions," she answered, thoroughly disappointed by his cool objectivity.

"I think that that is far too low an estimate," said Laudin, replacing the bottle of smelling-salts on the table. "I happen to know that a hundred and fifty millions is nearer the truth. But that's a matter that admits of no discussion, since the facts cannot be concealed. I therefore put it to you, as a purely provisional question, which leaves the rights of my client totally uncompromised: What is your idea of the amount for which you would conceivably be willing to settle with my client?"

Brigitte Hartmann's face grew dark with stubborn craft. In a low voice she declared that she didn't know, that she couldn't say at present, that it would have to be carefully thought over; that she would see. She had thought about ten millions. Oh, well, if that seemed too little to the Doctor, she added quickly, seeing him shrug his shoulders, she might raise the sum a little in consideration of the child. She'd like

to know whether she could come back after she had thought it over? Or would the Doctor mind coming out to see her, as he had done the other day? Then one could talk it over in peace. No? Well, of course the Doctor had very little time. And of course she was a very humble person. To be sure! Then might she write? Very well; she would write within a few days. Then she would go now, thanking the Doctor very humbly and cordially for all his kindness and patience.

And so she went. Laudin bowed and looked after her until the door had closed behind her. He dug his finger-nails into his palms, and on his face was an expression of immeasurable disgust.

18

He had sent word to Pia that he could not be home that evening. In a little tavern which he had occasionally frequented during the last twenty years, he took a frugal meal. Then he drove out to the suburb where Fraundorfer lived.

Since the day of Nicolas's suicide Fraundorfer had not left his flat. He received no one but Laudin, denying himself to everyone else. Thanks to the activities of Frau Blum, the apartment was in a more orderly condition. Few words passed between Fraundorfer and his new housekeeper. Pauline Blum went silently about her business. Fraundorfer grumbled now and then, but put no obstacles in her way.

He was working, or at least he let it be understood that he was working. When Laudin asked him what he was doing, he answered that he was working at an old and favourite project, a history of human stupidity. When Laudin dryly suggested that no possible span of human life would suffice for that undertaking, he agreed with a laugh, but contended that the very overwhelmingness of the material offered an excuse for the temerity of his attempt. Since no single human being

could hope to master the sources and the evidence, it would require the co-operation of many, of an entire areopagus of exalted spirits. Flaubert had evidently had a similar plan in mind, but he had scarcely touched upon his task, and, having barely begun, had had to lie down in his grave. A great pity. Fraundorfer had concentrated for some decades upon this gigantic work, and his notebooks were as swollen as torrents in the spring.

When Laudin entered, Fraundorfer was busy brewing grog. He wore a shabby green dressing-gown, held at the waist by a leather girdle. The colour of his hair had somehow changed; it hadn't grown grey, but greyish-green, like hay. At the sight of his friend he uttered a strange, guttural laugh of greeting, and stretched out two fingers of his huge hand. Then, silent as before, he addressed himself to watching the kettle on the spirit lamp. Laudin took up a book, sat down at the opposite end of the table, and began to read; it was a treatise on the philosophy of religion. On the margins of the pages Fraundorfer had scrawled pencilled comments: Idiocy . . . the degraded fool . . . the crazy babbler . . . unsupported rot . . . imbecile. . . . Other invectives were less printable.

The grog was ready; a full glass stood before each of the two men. Fraundorfer lit a cigar-stump, looked out of the window, and growled: "Snowing cats and dogs, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is snowing," said Laudin, and laid the book aside.

Continuing in the same tone, and sipping at his glass, Fraundorfer declared that the circumstance of the wound on his son's shoulder ought really to be investigated; he couldn't get it out of his head; it was like foreign matter in his flesh, or like a premonition bidding him complete some unfinished piece of business. He had harboured the intention of looking up the Dercum woman, and getting an account from her. But the thought of the streets was repulsive to him. Was it not possible, too, that she would come to him? One might even say that it would have been the proper thing to

do, the decent thing, the appropriate gesture. Quite possible, on the other hand, that she had inhibitions in the matter. Not surprising. Even a touch of bad conscience. Not surprising at all. Perhaps it was better that she had not appeared. What would have been the result? A bit of play-acting. He would rather hear nothing. He was making a fairly successful effort to dismiss the matter from his mind.

Laudin said: "I have determined to call on Fräulein Dercum. I am going to write to her and ask for an interview. I thought myself that you might . . . but perhaps such a meeting would hardly be agreeable. There would be something unseemly about the situation. I'll drop her a line to-morrow. My only trouble is that I'm so busy. All hell has broken loose during these past few days."

"Yes, do go," Fraundorfer replied, and lit a fresh cigar. "Go, and then give me a report concerning what you call her truth and innocence." He laughed a goat-like laugh. He opened a drawer. In it lay the photograph of the actress, the same photograph; it lay amid bills and letters and banknotes. He threw it over to Laudin. "Take it," he said, with ill-restrained rage; "it may serve you as a means of identification."

Laudin considered the portrait. The expression of the face seemed as gentle and thoughtful as it had on the day when he had seen it first. He spoke as though to himself. "It is easy and obvious to assume deceit or self-deception, but the very illusion of certain qualities is a delightful thing. How much there can be in a human countenance! And think of the masks that we have to put up with in daily life. Every evening when I leave my office I feel like washing my body with a powerful acid and bathing my eyes and scrubbing my hands."

"You have become Dyskolos," Fraundorfer murmured. "Were you not once Eukolos?"

"It may be so," Laudin admitted; "there are words enough with which to label conditions." He went to the sofa and sat down, supporting his head in his hand. For a long while he

gazed into vacancy, and the muscles of his cheeks and forehead were strangely tense. "I must tell you about a dream of mine," he began, in a muffled voice, "which really connects rather well with the conversation we had last Sunday. I had dreamed the dream even then. Only I didn't know. . . . I wasn't clear in my own mind as to its character. It may happen, as you know, that one only imagines having dreamed a certain dream, or, at least, that one unconsciously revises or changes it. However, I have dreamed the same dream again; I don't think that I have added anything to the dream as I now remember it. In this dream it seemed to me that I suddenly awoke and became aware of a man standing by my bedside, brandishing a knife. But in the midst of this awareness I seemed to fall asleep again, and in this sleep within my real sleep there arose a vivid discussion between this man and myself. I tried to prove to him that there would be no advantage in killing me, since there were neither gold nor jewels in the house—an untruth, by the way—and what other motive could there be for the deed? I couldn't harm him, nor was I in any way an obstacle to him. But he only shook his head, and sarcastically shrugged his shoulders. The room was so dark that I couldn't distinguish his features; I saw only the knife that was threatening me. From this sleep within a sleep I awoke again and again, and each time the question tormented me, first, whether he had driven the knife home; secondly, whether he was still in the room, or whether he was, in fact, only a dream of mine. And each time that I sank into that second sleep the violent debate with him began afresh. Finally, I seemed to lie there with open eyes, and I thought of argument after argument with which to dissuade him—what I had accomplished, how necessary I was to my family, and how well esteemed in my profession. But suddenly he came very close to me, and bent over me until I could feel his breath, and I saw, to my immeasurable terror, that it was I, myself. What did that mean, tell me? What do you think

of a dream like that? You are fond of rummaging in the hidden corners of the human brain."

A malicious grimace was Fraundorfer's answer. "A genuine lawyer's dream," said he, "a trial, a plea, and the whole thing perfectly stereotyped. Take a vacation. Your system needs ventilation."

Laudin evidently knew that no serious answers could be expected from Fraundorfer until the alcohol had gone to his head. But he seemed not to care whether his friend answered in accordance with his real thoughts and feelings or out of a mere sarcastic whim. Perhaps for this very reason he found it easy to talk to Fraundorfer about himself and his difficulties. "A lawyer's dream," he said, "that ought really to be the most wildly confused dream in the world." He leaned backward and stared at the ceiling. "Such a dream would hardly be describable in words. Ever since I saw a famous painting in an art gallery, representing a witches' Sabbath, I have had to smile at the feebleness of the artist's imagination, which cannot even succeed in causing a shudder to a normal human being like myself. Life, which has the reputation of being flat and prosy, has quite other revelations to give us. In both irrelevance and tragedy it outdoes the imaginings of madmen. It seems to me that there must be certain fibres in the tissues of my brain which need only to be stirred by memory for me to be automatically transferred into a world in which hope is dead in very truth. A lawyer's dream, indeed!"

He went on talking while Fraundorfer heated more water for his grog. He proceeded to expatiate on this world without hope, to roll it out, a little for his own benefit, too, as though it were a map. The impulses that led to this exposition must have been of long standing, must long ago have fretted their channels through his brain. For everything he said sounded finished and precise. All that the moment added was the translation into the audible. It was a summing-up, a bitterly ironical generalization: behold, friends and fellow-citizens,

what I am doing and what comes of it! Out with it just this once! You can turn away if you want to, or put your fingers in your ears. It's not essential that you should say yes or no, or adopt any attitude. . . . In this man's soul there must have been fermentations of whose extent and consequences he himself was not wholly aware. It was curious that he should suddenly rise, walk over to a little shaving-mirror that hung beside the window, look at his image in it, laugh a little to himself, and then resume his former position on the sofa.

Fraundorfer, brooding over his grog, did not once interrupt him. He spoke on, and from his words there rose a vast delineation of life, in which human figures were interwoven into an inextricable snarl. These creatures had no names. Instead of names they had occupations, offices, missions and clearly distinguishable external destinies. They were merchants, judges, physicians, public officials, small shopkeepers, mechanics, writers, and women of all kinds, ages, and degrees. This mass of figures was lost in the mists of the background. You could but guess at stranger phenomena beyond the reach of the eye.

All these faces were carved by definitely directed greed, but their lips were slack with the weariness of words spoken in vain. There were those who would not relax their grip upon each other, and those who were fleeing from each other in hostility or fear. There were those who cried out, yet could not make themselves understood for all their crying, and those who whispered and feared to be overheard. There were some who were panting for justice, and others triumphant in their consciousness of having done it violence. And none were satisfied; they still rushed forward, they still raged on. . . . And now the picture assumes the character of a cinematographic film. Generation after generation races by. There is pursuit and capture and separation. It is a pitiless hunt, a hunt whose motive is annihilation or loot. This moment's victor is the next moment's sacrifice; tenderness and passion

are succeeded by hatred and disgust. And nothing has any meaning. It is often only a change in the lighting that alters the significance of the images. Ultimately no one knows what truly serves his purpose, or what his duty is. The man who calls life a battle of Titans has merely taken it into his head to see dwarfs enlarged to supernatural dimensions. The judge's sentence is an accident, his decisions are favouritism or empty formulæ. There is no vital spark within, no *dæmon*, no revivifying fire. Life is like a cobbler's shop where for a thousand years shoes have been cobbled in one identical way. Work is a pretext for idleness, and necessity a pretext for making a machine the master.

And the sounds you hear are for ever the same. There are five or six hundred words with which men manage to express demand and encroachment, justification and resistance, remorse and confession, reproach and calumny, truth and falsehood, and all their daily needs of speech. Unbelievably absurd—this ever-recurrent verbiage of stereotyped formulæ, as though men's brains consisted of newsprint. Without becoming aware of their poverty, they label their deepest and most painful experiences with a meaningless stamp. Always men and women lacerate one another, and always with these same five or six hundred words—the very excreta of the soul. One thinks of the breaking of cripples on the wheel, one hears the dreary moaning of the dumb, and if you watch the evildoers carefully you find that they do not even know their own sorry business. Punishment, expiation, equity, justice—all are ground out of a mill—mere stage-thunder—puppets stuffed with paper phrases. He had recently brought a suit against a man on behalf of his wife. The man, a vulgar parvenu, puffed up with power and possession, a provincial tyrant, at once weak and sensual, had fallen in love with a *cocotte*, and had left his wife and children in want. While he wasted his substance with this woman his family didn't have enough to eat. Not satisfied with that, he sued for a divorce

on absurd and trumped-up grounds. The man's suit was hopeless, of course. The wife, typically enough, refused to make an amicable adjustment. He became brutal and threatening; he beat her and slandered her, and came home at all hours of the night, noisy and enraged. Scenes took place which made the maid-servant run to the police-station, and the children kneel before their father, beseeching him to spare their mother. The worst of it was that the family was really in frightful want, and there was no power on earth to make the man fulfil his obvious duties. By the help of an astute lawyer he always succeeded in finding a way out. So Laudin arranged for an interview with the man in the presence of the latter's solicitor. And it was of this colleague that he wanted to speak now. He had never met him before. He was one of those talented men without conscience, who have brought their calling and its services down to the level of a dicer's game. Their stakes are the varying interpretations of doubtful or equivocal precedents which are suggested by their astute scrutiny. They are past-masters of all the arts of delay and procrastination, and they are capable of defending obvious injustice and chicanery with more emphasis and passion than their opponents can bring to the support of the purest cause. —Well, then, Laudin met this man and discussed the matter with him, and at the end of fifteen minutes had to own himself completely beaten. His feeling of impotence turned, in fact, into one of depressed admiration. This is how one ought to be, he thought; one should look at things as this man does, and turn falsehood into truth, and cover shamelessness with shamelessness that has once been sanctioned. Everything else, he confessed to himself, was mere helpless bungling. What use were conscientiousness, decency, integrity, humanity, moral responsibility—of what avail were these if such a man could triumph? And he would triumph. Compared to him Laudin was a sorry clown, fighting with weapons that could not even scratch the other's skin.

And at this point—was Fraundorfer asleep, or had he but submerged his mind for the time being below the level of consciousness?—at this point Laudin seemed more deeply moved than he had been for many a year. He asked: Why not become that adversary? Why not identify oneself with that hostile nature, since one did not, after all, fulfil or transcend one's own? Why not throw aside this old and weary and threadbare creature that one was, and become and be another? Vanish from one's own self, as it were, and be re-born out of that vanishing? "Is this a lawyer's dream, too?" he asked Fraundorfer. But Fraundorfer was dumb. Either he did not understand his friend or did not choose to follow his mood.

Laudin seemed abandoned to himself. He rose and paced to and fro. His eyes flickered, and his body seemed unsteady. Yet he had fought his way to a certain clarity concerning himself, and he had suddenly and painfully conquered that habitual sloth which makes a man stay in a certain groove and embrace voluntary blindness. "Who am I, then, and what?" he asked, "A man who loosens bonds, a man whose office and whose bread it is to hammer the iron hoops from rotten barrels. A destroyer by vocation, one who demolishes as a matter of habit and routine, under the protection of public opinion and the law. And so, in truth, I am even now that despicable adversary. No wonder that I am the man brandishing the knife above me in my own bed. It is senseless to continue this self-deception, senseless to try to evade the brutal fact. Either one is citizen, professional slave, draught animal, father and husband, or . . ."

Or what? What? What is this alternative, Friedrich Laudin? You cannot proceed an inch upon that road. Beyond that "or" the ground collapses under your feet. One more step and you no longer know—anything!

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During the last words Fraundorfer had looked up and morosely squinted at Laudin. "People who are always dealing

with irreconcilable contradictions make me absolutely tired," he growled. "They are usually pirouetting on the hyphen that separates their antinomies. Look here, by nature you are really a man inclined to admit all obligations. These wild contradictions are not in your line. Draught animal, you say? Well, perhaps. Then pull. If you can pocket your expenses and your fees, don't let the other considerations bother you. I wish I had your means of inspiring clients with respect. And the load that you are dragging in your cart is, after all, a very estimable one."

Laudin stood beside him and laid his hand on Fraundorfer's shoulder. "Stop," said he. And when Fraundorfer looked his morose question, he said: "Don't try to shake me, nor to take me too literally. I am concerned with things that lie beyond love, beyond custom and duty, perhaps even beyond the concept of honour——"

"Ah, ha, all in the service of the well-known firm, Truth and Innocence, *unlimited*?" Fraundorfer cynically interposed. "I doubt whether the aforesaid firm is solvent."

But Laudin continued: "Within the endless variety of forms assumed by human life, it must be easy enough for a discriminating mind like yours to recognize a type of relationship so far above the ordinary as to make any unworthy suspicion of it an impudence and a sin. Question any hundred people in this city upon the subject of the Laudins' marriage, and they will answer that they do not know a more successful one. And they will be people of insight and experience, high-minded and just in their perceptions. Should I contradict them? Am I in a position to do so? For do these people err? Never has there been a quarrel between Pia and myself, never any serious cause of friction. In brief, she is a model wife. Not for an hour, not for a moment does she forget what she owes her husband in consideration, care, lovingkindness and devotion. But look. . . . Well, how can I explain it? It is so frightfully delicate, and at the same time so frightfully

painful. Rather, it has become so, become so—as all things do become. There is no activity in the process. Life flows into character as water into a basin. I have always adored Pia. She was to me like a creature of a higher type. She was to be saved from the meanness and the grubbiness of every day. She was, as it were, to be carried across the puddles in the street. Such notions cling to a man. One comes to hold the woman constantly in one's arms, and to carry her across the puddles of life. The gesture of adoration becomes petrified. If you join a fellow-pilgrim, and persuade him from the outset that he must not, at any price, wet his feet, you cannot complain if he grows used to depending on your muscles. And thus all one's labour and one's conflicts are taken for granted. She does not notice that your breath is giving out, that your arm is growing lame. She takes it for granted that you work, that you support the household, that you gratify every wish, that you pay for all display. She takes for granted your conflicts and your vexations. She has her own conflicts and vexations, and is not beyond the reach of care. But one day you stand there and ask yourself: How is this to go on? Free impulse and stimulus are gone. Nothing is left but a follower or a companion. The common pilgrimage is over. The things that remain are matters of course. Each specializes cheerfully in the appointed tasks. You are out in the world and she is in the house. Ah, if you were a locksmith and came home some day with a crushed finger—then things might come to life. Otherwise, you have the peacefulness of a domestic bliss that is sixteen years old, and life is like a dish of coagulated milk, sour and thick, and you drown in it like a fly, sober and unintoxicated."

Fraundorfer laughed approvingly. "To drown in a state of sobriety—that is hell."

A long silence ensued. On the table lay a heap of scraps of paper. A letter had been torn up. Laudin carefully gathered up the fragments; it looked as though he were going to count

and collect them. In the meantime Herr Schmidt crept from his basket in the corner, tripped up to Fraundorfer's chair, stretched his four paws, and looked up at his master with something between a whimper and a lament.

Fraundorfer bent down to him. "My compliments, Herr Schmidt. You evidently think that your opinion ought to be asked occasionally. Quite right, too. You probably have a sounder one than we bipeds. What do you say now? That a certain hour approaches? Quite right. The hour of eleven. At eleven o'clock our young man used to come home. You used always to be heard from then, being of a punctual and vigilant nature. True—true. And how are we to account for it that he hasn't shown up now for the sixth successive day? What rotten misbehaviour, Herr Schmidt! For the present, however, you had better calm yourself. We bipeds are about to search out the causes of his non-appearance. And our friend is willing to take an interest in the matter, although in a certain respect it is probably too late. But he says that he has an intimate knowledge of such cases. Be calm, Herr Schmidt, be calm. . . ."

With a few inarticulate sounds he dropped his chin upon his chest. Herr Schmidt stopped whining, went to the door, sniffed about there, and then lay down at Fraundorfer's shapeless feet.

"Yes there is a problem to be solved here," said Laudin, deeply moved, and held out his hand across the table to his friend. Fraundorfer took it slowly and without looking up.

Then Laudin went. Frau Blum carried a light through the hall for him. "He sits and drinks all night," she said. "Sometimes he makes a croaking sound, and you can't tell whether he's crying or laughing; sometimes he talks to the dog. At five o'clock in the morning he begins to write."

PART II

19

Laudin saw that there was still a light in Pia's bedroom. He went in. She lay on her back under the canopy of the wide bed, her hands peacefully crossed over her bosom, and smiled in welcome. But she was pale. The lamp beside her bed was shaded.

"Are you not well, Pia?" he asked in some anxiety.

No, she said, she didn't feel especially well, and since to-morrow was Sunday she thought of spending the day in bed. She liked the idea of being able to rest for twenty-four hours.

"So you must, darling," said Laudin, "though I confess that I wanted to take you to the theatre to-morrow. I never get a chance during the week, you know. I wanted to go to see that young actress . . ."

"Oh yes, I know," Pia nodded. "Ah, well, you had better go alone, Friedrich. I really don't feel like it. Marlene and Relly are invited to the Arndts; otherwise you could have taken them. You know how they love to go out with you from time to time. But that isn't possible now. Marlene wouldn't disappoint them at the last moment. And as for Relly—of course, the play would have to be a suitable one. What are they playing?"

"*Kätzchen von Heilbronn*. I can't say that the play is a great favourite of mine. Its romanticism is rather morbid, and Relly's impressions are so violent that I should hardly care . . ."

"That is true. You had better go alone."

Laudin drew up a chair and sat down beside the bed. "After all that has happened, you understand that this Fräulein Dercum doesn't interest me merely as an artist. Within the

next few days there will have to be a personal interview between her and myself. I thought that I might, in a way, prepare myself for that by seeing her on the stage. It might give me some notion of the woman with whom I am dealing."

"Do you think so?" Pia's tone was gently sceptical, and she laid her hand on his. "Do you think the performance will tell you anything? The performance of Kätchen? I doubt it. From her Kätchen you will learn nothing. I'm afraid you're too naïve, Friedrich."

Laudin laughed. "Quite possible," he replied. "I wish I could rely upon your sharper or, let us say, more incorruptible vision."

"You haven't been able to persuade Fraundorfer to dine with us, have you?" Pia inquired. "His dining with us on Sunday had become a sort of pleasant habit. I believe you enjoyed it, too. How did you find him to-day?"

"Hardly in a condition to make his presence at the family table advisable," Laudin answered. "It's very sweet of you to think of it, but I don't think it would be wise, at present. The man is shattered. The tragedy has shaken him to the foundations. He fights against it and denies it to his own soul. He clings desperately to his dog and to his work, and tries to deaden his feelings with wine and whisky and strong cigars. But nothing helps him. He's going under."

Pia's eyes were thoughtful. An impulse to ask many questions seemed to struggle within her. She had probably given more thought to the suicide of Nicolas Fraundorfer than she had allowed anyone to guess. She had told Laudin nothing of Marlene's passionate outburst; she never permitted herself to submit to him or discuss with him those things which, in her opinion, came within the domain of her duty. She had listened with an expression of cool interest to the rumours that had been retailed to her, and the excited suspicions of her acquaintances. In this matter, as in all others having to

do with the world, she did not vary her habitual and apparently quite conventional bearing and attitude. To express in words what was in her mind or her heart would probably have appeared as unseemly to her as to go out into the streets of the city without gloves.

Yet for the past few days an observer might have noted in her an uncharacteristic air of introspection. Perhaps Nicolas had made a deeper appeal to her than other young men of his age. She was not fond of young men as a rule, and was quietly amused by most of them. Or else the sudden determination to die, on the part of one so full of life and fire, had puzzled her, and she could find no adequate explanation in any of the various motives that people had suggested. Possibly, too, the continuous restlessness and secret rebelliousness of Marlene had given her food for reflection. However this might be, she did not break her silence, and at the very mention of Nicolas's name her soul seemed to withdraw within itself.

Now she was still silent, though her unspoken words were clearly reflected in her eyes and features.

She looked very attractive as she lay there curbing her emotions and reflections. It seemed as though she, who was so imprisoned, had gained an unexpected youth from beyond her prison walls when that strange event had made a breach in them. It might be that the breach through which she suddenly surveyed the world about her would soon close again. Perhaps to-morrow the things that filled her life would repair the breach. It was, at all events, not pleasant to be exposed to the draught that blew in through it. She shivered.

For a moment her eyes and Laudin's met. He bent down and took her left hand, and held it between his two hands. Pia was passive, but she looked away from him, and said softly: "Ah, Friedrich, we are old people now."

He touched her hand with his lips and rose at once. "Good night, Pia," he said amiably. Not a shadow of vexation had

appeared upon his face. Pia's searching eyes were well aware of this fact.

But as he walked to the door she looked after him with tender pity.

20

Laudin wrote to Fraundorfer:

"Since I shall be very busy during the next few days I just want to tell you briefly that, in answer to my written request for an interview, I received a note from Luise Dercum asking me to call on her at five o'clock on Monday afternoon. It goes without saying that I shall accept the invitation. Moreover, I saw her on the stage yesterday, and I cannot deny that she made a most unusual impression on me. If anyone had asked me I should have said that it was utterly out of the question for any actress, by acting the Kätchen of Kleist, to give the spectator so intense a feeling of being in the presence of a contemporary and a living passion. I am no critic by profession. On the contrary, my attitude, especially toward the theatre, is wholly unprofessional. Thanks to the overwork of the past few years I have been more and more rarely able to taste the delights of a good performance. This does not seem to me to be a case where the customary weighing of merits and defects is in place, but rather an opportunity to refresh oneself with the highest type of artistic delight after the weariness of the common day. I very much doubt whether in the contemporary theatre there is another example of such charm, of a personality so moving, a voice so soulful, so great a power of touching the heart—in brief, so complete a blend of nature and art. I was infinitely refreshed and stimulated. Anyone who, like myself, is much concerned with the world's filth, must be grateful if, even for one short evening, there arises from that world a thing that is a torch and a delight. To my surprise I learned that Luise Dercum, contrary to your

belief, too, is a married woman (nothing seems more incredible when one sees her on the stage). Her husband, an actor named Keller, is said to be in an asylum in Berlin. The ugliest rumours are abroad concerning the situation. But I won't even mention them, for fear of sharing the world's guilt in its habitual lust for slander. Take care of yourself, my dear friend. I hope to see you soon."

On Wednesday morning Laudin received a few lines from Luise Dercum, written in the large, firmly-wrought handwriting which had impressed him the first time he had seen it. She asked him to postpone his visit until the beginning of the following week; she would let him know the exact day later. She said that she was too busy to receive him until then, and she would, moreover, be called out of town during the last days of the current week.

On the same day he found two letters from Brigitte Hartmann on his office desk. Hardly had he begun to read them when Konrad Lanz was announced. Before receiving him, however, he had to speak to a young solicitor who represented Frau Constance Altacher. Like many women of the upper middle classes, Frau Altacher seemed to have an almost morbid fondness for lawyers, and for exhaustive discussions with them. In spite of this definite partiality she seemed actually to trust no lawyer, or, rather, she listened and poured out her heart only to that member of the legal profession who, at a given moment, catered for her desires and agreed with her opinions.

When Laudin was alone again, he picked up Frau Hartmann's letters and read them with a shake of the head. He even called in his partner, Dr. Heimeran, in order to get his opinion of these documents. Heimeran, a tall, lean, careworn man with a skull as bald and elliptical as an egg, advanced the opinion that the writer in question was a dangerous and litigious person with a tendency toward imbecility.

Dr. Heimeran was always inclined to attribute psychical or intellectual anomalies to the majority of human beings. According to him, there were not three adults in a hundred who were mentally normal, and his opinion of their moral qualities was no whit more favourable.

Frau Hartmann's letters were composed in a curious style: cultivated and even pompous terms of speech alternated with vulgarities and dialect terms; mistakes in spelling were corrected now and then, but they were by no means eliminated. For example, she had written "resolt." She had drawn a line through this and had then written "result." A line or paragraph of almost servile obsequiousness and humility was followed by an access of insolence, or a veiled threat, or a derisive challenge. Self-abasement alternated with morbid arrogance. Laudin had often had occasion to observe that women who had in some way been able to ruin the man to whom they had once belonged, but who had disappointed and deserted them—that such women were habitually subject to an indescribable conceit, even though they had ruined themselves into the bargain. This characteristic appeared in Constance Altacher, although he had not as yet any definite reason to suppose that she was guilty of the collapse of her married life. It was the perception of this conceit in her that had at once aroused his suspicion.

Brigitte Hartmann informed him that after mature reflection upon all the circumstances, she did not feel that she could consent to any settlement of the supposed claim of Caroline Lanz. The woman was evidently a woman of loose morals who had simply persuaded and seduced poor Hartmann. She, Brigitte, didn't feel impelled to set a premium on human depravity. Furthermore, she had pecuniary worries of her own. She was willing to send the Lanz woman some cast-off clothing and some linen. If she had been a decent woman she wouldn't have taken up with a married man. She would at least have waited till he had his divorce. She

didn't see why she should take any interest in the child. Who was going to give her satisfactory proof that it was really Hartmann's child? Wenches of that sort were quite capable of trying to hide one sin by committing another. The Lanz woman had destroyed her home, and she cursed her and the child, too. Surely Dr. Laudin would be able to appreciate the feelings of a mother and of a womanly heart.

Later on Laudin said to Dr. Heimeran: "If God were to protect all the women who try to shelter their crimes and inhumanities behind their motherhood, the fact that a woman has borne children would suffice to send half the human race to the galleys."

Her second letter was quite different in character; it was more incoherent and more mysterious. It had evidently been written later, for it started by proposing a personal interview with Caroline Lanz. She said she was willing to see the Lanz woman and to be guided in her own attitude by that individual's bearing. Here, of course, you had her insane arrogance in its most striking form. Brigitte Hartmann wanted to play the rôle of judge. She wanted to be both arbiter and executioner. But the condition of this kindness on her part—she made no concession without conditions—was that Dr. Laudin was to be present at the interview. He was to judge; his word was to be decisive; she was willing to submit herself to him; if he considered her guilty she would be willing to expiate her guilt (as though there could be any question of it!); she saw in him, so to speak, her ideal of a man (she had spelled it "ideel"); but he, too, had better be careful before he tried to tell her any more rot about a copy of the will; she was at the end of her endurance. She had been hounded long enough and was ready for any desperate act—oh, yes, she was. She didn't care much about life, and she wasn't going to be tricked or fooled; she insisted on being treated sincerely, even as she was always open and aboveboard with others; one conciliatory word and she was all kindness; but if she were harshly treated

she could hold her own, and she would see to it that her enemies were put to flight and shame. She had her own pride, too, although she was always ready to bow down to Dr. Laudin. She'd do anything for him, but not for the concubine and bastard of Hartmann. No, not a thing! It was in this spirit that she begged to sign herself his very devoted *et cetera*. Then came a postscript. Her lawyer, whom she had seen after all, had advised her against making any compromise with the Lanz woman. Since no will had existed, as far as she knew, she could obviously have destroyed none. She had no hesitation in taking her oath to that effect. If Dr. Laudin wanted to force her to take an oath, let him go ahead. She would accept the inevitable calmly. Finally, she wished to inform him that she had let the house and the farm, and would be staying during the next few months with her cousin, in the Josefstadt.

"An exceedingly dangerous woman," Laudin murmured after he had finished reading the letters. He was far too wise to despise these documents, in which the writer's insanely exaggerated self-esteem was blended with a gloomy delight in engaging the attention of others. He knew these to be the characteristic symptoms of unbridled instincts, of repressed vengeance and envenomed eroticism. He knew that the consequences of such conditions were wholly incalculable.

He rang for the doorkeeper and told him to show in Konrad Lanz.

The appearance of Konrad Lanz had changed considerably. He wore a new coat and a new suit; his hair was cut, and his face was carefully shaved. Yet his features had a strange immobility, almost a rigidity, and his skin had the yellow pallor of one who had just risen from a sick-bed. Laudin, observing all this, asked Lanz how he felt. With downcast eyes the young man replied that he was very well, that his circumstances had undergone a marked improvement recently; he had found new pupils and had been able to charge better

prices. He was very grateful to Dr. Laudin for the latter's sympathetic inquiry. Not once did he raise his eyes. When he sat down at Laudin's invitation, it was the pattern in the carpet that seemed to arouse his uninterrupted interest. Laudin looked at him searchingly before he addressed him. "You wanted to know how your affair was progressing. I'm sorry that I can't say anything definite, yet. Frau Hartmann's behaviour is that of someone not wholly responsible. She is now planning to arrange for a personal interview between your sister and herself——"

"I don't think that will lead to anything," Lanz interrupted.

"Neither do I. But I have the impression that a sort of retroactive terror has stolen upon her, and it may be that there is some hope in this circumstance. I am fairly sure that we will be able to get a moderate sum out of the lady in the end. But we must have patience."

"Certainly, Doctor. We are not lacking in patience. What a sorry figure I should cut, anyhow, if I were to be impatient in this matter! It isn't any such motive that brings me here. I have something on my mind. I am attacked by evil premonitions. There is something wrong with my heart. If anything were to happen to me, Caroline would be left quite alone in the world. I wanted to beg you from the bottom of my heart, Dr. Laudin, not to abandon her wholly under such circumstances. It may be only a hypochondriacal notion on my part; it probably is, in fact. And Heaven knows I hate to make this further demand upon your kindness. A person is so utterly alone in the world. So few people can be relied on; and if you could give me this assurance I'd be inexpressibly grateful."

Once more Laudin's searching glance rested on the young man. "Don't worry," he replied. "I won't abandon your sister." He waved aside the young man's gratitude: "You mustn't make life more difficult by conjuring up non-existent troubles; you have enough real ones. Courage, my boy. By

the way, I seem to remember that when you were a boy you could draw exceedingly well. I suppose you haven't lost that talent. Now I happen to have been told yesterday that at the Anatomical Institute they are looking for an assistant who can make drawings of certain types of preparations which are not suitable for photographic reproduction. Would you like me to recommend you for the vacancy?"

Lanz, who, at the mention of his talent for drawing, had grown pale, so that the yellow of his cheeks had turned to gray, and who had drawn his handkerchief across his forehead, said hastily: "During the next few months I have only one aim, Doctor—that of passing my final examinations. I am devoted to the science I have chosen—entirely devoted. I can say that truthfully. I must finish. I must finally be able to show what is really in me. Now, if in addition to my tutoring I were to——"

"I understand you," Laudin interrupted him. "Then there is nothing more now. If I hear anything more about the Hartmann case, I'll let you know at once." He pressed the young man's hand and, with a deep bow, the latter withdrew.

After a while, as he was rising from his chair, Laudin observed an envelope on the floor. It lay under the chair on which Konrad Lanz had been sitting. He picked it up, and since it wasn't sealed he drew out a sheet of letter-paper without considering that the student must inadvertently have dropped the envelope when he was pulling out his handkerchief. To his amazement he read the following words: "Dear Madam,—Since I have determined to devote my entire time, from now on, to my studies, I regret that I can no longer teach your son. I have given up all my tutoring engagements because of an immediate and necessary duty to myself. With many thanks for your kindness, I am, yours very sincerely, Konrad Lanz."

"How extraordinary!" said Laudin to himself. "He talked most emphatically about new pupils... about the many

hours of tutoring that made it impossible for him to do anything else. . . . What curious lies! What's their motive. . . .?" Since the letter was stamped and addressed, he sealed it and threw it on the table where a pile of letters was waiting to be posted.

On his way home he stopped the car at a florist's. But the very moment he touched the door-handle he shook his head, and murmured, in an almost frightened tone: "No, that won't do at all." He leaned back in the car.

22

"I'd like to talk to you for fifteen minutes this evening," Marlene said to her father. "Have you that much time to spare me? Or are you too tired?"

Laudin put his arm round the girl's shoulder and took her into the library. Relly looked after them with curiosity, turned up her nose, and then, in an access of tenderness which was demonstrative without being pointed, snuggled up against her mother.

Marlene, first of all, very courteously asked her father to forgive her for disturbing the peaceful domesticity of his evening. This she said with a tinge of irony. But she didn't know how else to get hold of him, and it was a very serious matter concerning which she was anxious to hear his opinion.

With equal courtesy, and with an equal tinge of irony, so that the resemblance between father and daughter became more emphatic at this moment, Laudin assured her that he was entirely at her disposal, and begged her to speak her mind. With a grown-up attempt at informality, Marlene crossed her legs. Her attitude dropped back into the childlike when she took hold of her two braids with her little hands.

She asked whether her father had heard that there had been a suicide in her school too? Laudin had not, as a matter

of fact, heard of it. Marlene related how one of her school-mates, named Maria Feldner, had taken an overdose of veronal three days ago. No one knew how she had obtained the poison. She had died at the sanatorium yesterday. The case, like the story of Nicolas Fraundorfer, had naturally caused a great deal of talk. Most of the talk had been idle and pointless. But what had shocked all of the girls was the apparent lack of any motive for the act. Maria had been the child of wealthy parents, had had everything she wanted in the world, and no one had ever observed in her anything like boredom or melancholy. However, she had had one favourite chum among the girls, a girl named Berg, whose first name was Maria, too, and the tragic young woman had asked so insistently for this chum during the last day of her life, that her friend had been brought to see her. So Maria Berg had been present when the other Maria, sick unto death, had addressed her father and mother, who stood weeping at her bedside, as follows: I couldn't go on living, because I was so afraid of life. You never told me what life is really like. You hid everything from me and made everything about me seem lovely. But I found out from the newspapers how horrible the world is, how cruel men are to each other, and many, many other things, which I didn't even understand, but which gave me such a heartache that I couldn't sleep any more. And since my terror grew and grew, I determined to die. "That's what Maria Berg told me, quite literally," Marlene said, and looked full into her father's face.

"This Maria Feldner," said Laudin, "was evidently a very unhappy being. But she was sick, too. Healthy natures defend themselves against the world like animals that are attacked, and even find a certain pleasure in the combat against evil and persecution. Such weakness or, if you like, such sensitiveness as afflicted your young friend is a very frequent phenomenon in our age, as frequent as dipsomania or madness, as brutality and bloodthirstiness. This means

that the demands upon capable people are higher than ever, and that it is the duty of the strong and brave to put forth all their powers. Don't you agree with me?"

"That is true," replied Marlene raising her head. "Greater demands are made upon the capable. How do they meet those demands? With what? And do the strong do their best? And where are the brave? I wish you would point them out to me, father, and name them to me. I know that you yourself are capable and strong and brave. That is why I have come to you. But are you profoundly convinced that you accomplish anything? I mean for human society on the whole. I mean to say, have you the feeling that the world is growing better because you are what you are?"

"A difficult question, my child," said Laudin, oppressed by Marlene's implacable logic and shrinking from it within as a flame shrinks from the wind. "A man tied to a profession is in a groove which he is not free to leave, bound for a goal in the determination of which he had no voice. You are touching a sore spot in our social order. We seem to will, but that is appearance, not reality. Free obligation and sordid compulsion have become identical. And few of us attain a spiritual height where will and duty merge into that higher compulsion which is the impulse of the master not the obedience of the slave."

"I understand perfectly what you have said, father; oh, perfectly," Marlene answered, with delight. She was truly delighted at hearing from him, beyond all expectations, a living echo of her words. "But you cannot simply let things drift. Not everyone can be satisfied in his groove. Not in the long run, surely. Because if that is so, things are bound to go from bad to worse, and the young, who know little of practical life, will despair of those who are older and who govern the practical life. Despair and distrust lead nowhere; they are negative qualities; that's why I thought——" she flushed and hesitated.

"Well, what did you think, Marlene?" said Laudin, in a kindly and encouraging tone, as he bent closer toward her.

That was hard to formulate. Her lips opened and closed again. Her braids were crossed over her chest. But gradually, as she added sentence to sentence, the germinating thought seemed to flicker through.

She said that she knew that what she was saying was neither definite nor clear in detail. She was groping her way, seeking both outline and foundation. It seemed to her that the whole educational system to which she was being subjected was sterile. She had no faith in the school nor in the teachers. She had often said to herself, of course, that with the appearance of a real personality among them faith would appear, too. But that was exactly what was lacking. Possibly that was the reason why she never had any feeling of satisfaction, but rather a sensation of emptiness about her. And that made her impatient. She felt as though someone had slammed in her face the very door through which she must inevitably pass. Who was to open it for her? Who had the key? Her father had mastered such an enormous section of contemporary life that she had imagined that he might help her. Perhaps salvation lay in the direction of the humblest tasks: cleaning windows, sewing, doing housework? Perhaps she ought to go into a factory and earn her living? All that she was doing now was all so bloodless. She thought she was realistic enough to know that the plan of working in a factory had its fantastic side, and that a thousand reasons could be urged against it. But that was just an example. At all events she knew she wasn't afraid. She was no Maria Feldner. She wanted to be a woman and a mother, and to realize the responsibilities that she would have to assume. Could it ever be too early to do that? And most of her contemporaries felt the same. They wanted something new, radically new. At any cost they wanted to make the world happier and better—those among them, at least, who could be said to have brains and a heart. Didn't her father know that?

Didn't he believe it? He ought to hear them talking. He ought to hear them discussing their parents and brothers and sisters, and religion, and science, and authority, and the State. They saw through all the lies and outmoded laws, and all the contradictions between what was taught and what was done. Perhaps father would laugh at them. But upon reflection he would be convinced that the matter was no joke. On the contrary it often seemed to her that she and those who thought and felt as she did were like foreign troops quartered upon this adult world, and that they had their arsenal of weapons hidden in secret places. It was no fun to walk about your father's and mother's house like a soldier from a foreign land. It was no pleasure to know or feel that though father and mother were living together and were fond of each other, they were not really at one (at this point tears came into her eyes); she detested secrets; she wanted openness, clearness, light, everything except mystery. For every mystery was like a trapdoor beneath which a murderer lies in wait.

Laudin was profoundly perturbed. His face has grown pale. Suppose that suddenly a charming picture on the wall, the portrait of a human being, which one has looked at with pleasure day after day—suppose such a picture were suddenly to step out of its frame and begin to speak, to speak strange words, words that struck boldly into the carefully concealed hiding-places of life! Laudin's consternation was like that of a man who has just been addressed by such an image. First of all he had to pull himself together and reflect on his answer. But what answer could he give that would not be in the nature of evasion, of embarrassment, of an attempt to gain time? Had he not himself pronounced the dismal axiom of the five or six hundred words with which your average philistine deals with all the situations in life? Now it was for him to see whether his range of expression went beyond them. For there was no denying that this was a serious hour, face to face

with this daughter who had granted him an insight into the hidden fires of her soul, and who came to him, to use her own image, as the emissary of a hostile army.

He might rid his vocabulary of *clichés*, and carefully avoid such expressions as immaturity, confusion, insufficient experience, the necessity for guidance, and so forth, yet he knew that the drift of what he said was the same as though he had used these phrases. He was keenly aware of his own entire ineffectiveness. It was even more difficult to refute her criticism of his marriage, or to attempt to differentiate between her childish assumptions and the amazing acuteness of her womanly intuition. Arming himself with an expression of kindly indulgence, he assured Marlene that in this particular matter she was not competent to judge of the essential things; the refractions of life in this mirror were too delicate to be detected by a wild passion for veracity, however honourable. In every river there were rocks and sudden depths, and only the pilot who had been familiar with the waters for years could steer his vessel through them. Hardly the youthful excursionist who wanted to catch fish for his lunch. The question of competence derived from experience did enter into the problems of life. He willingly acknowledged the entire sovereignty of the rights which were Marlene's by virtue of her youth. But he must beg for an adjournment of her stormy appetite for life, for a brief postponement in her own interest. On the other hand, his answer with regard to her reference to the relations between himself and her mother must consist in an appeal to her tolerance in return for his own. For any defence on his part would be granting the validity of her accusation. And for that he was not prepared.

His elaborate, juristic style of speech, pervasively ironic in character, disappointed Marlene bitterly, as he could see from her expression. But it showed her, too, that her urgent demand for truth had led her beyond all bounds. She seemed to feel that the rebuke hidden in his words was deserved,

for she hung her head in shame. But one cannot revoke what one has seriously uttered. The spoken word is irrevocable. Perhaps a humorous dissimulation might heal the wound. She said that she would wait and do nothing without her father's advice and approval; she knelt before him with an almost kittenish gesture, and looked up at him smilingly, as though symbolically to express a temporary subservience. Thus the interview ended as it had begun, in mutual courtesy and apparent agreement. If looked at closely, it marked a vain effort of these two to find a path to one another.

"Good night, father," said Marlene, and brushed his forehead with a kiss, and went out. Upstairs in their room Relly was waiting for her, and Relly was one mass of restless curiosity, as though Marlene had done some hurt to their father, which she, Relly, as protectress of the house, should have prevented. But since Marlene was silent and uncommunicative, Relly began to sing, with deliberate intent to annoy. She hoped that her singing would lead to a quarrel, in the course of which, if only she could vex her sister sufficiently, involuntary confessions would be made.

But this hope, too, proved deceptive. So she only murmured, "Mother Weeping-willow is stalking about again this evening."

For several days the girls' grandmother had taken to the queer habit of wandering by night through the upstairs corridors, as though she were looking for something. If questioned, she gave no answer, peered into all the corners, muttered incomprehensibly, and finally, shaking her head, returned to her overheated room. This behaviour frightened the girls. Marlene opened the door a little and listened, but Mother Weeping-willow had disappeared. The dwarf Uistiti was wailing, and his nurse could be heard scolding him.

For a long time after Marlene had left him, Laudin sat without changing his position. It was late when he rose. Very slowly his face brightened. After walking up and down

for a long time he went to his desk, arranged his pen-knife, scissors, stationery, and ash-tray in their accustomed order. Then he took the ivory case in which he kept stamps, emptied the stamps out, arranged and counted them according to their denominations, and marked the result in pencil on a page of his calendar.

23

Constance Altacher came in person to give Laudin the written report which she had promised him. It was clear that she wanted to dramatize the situation. Her tragic bearing obliged the lawyer to adopt a sympathetic attitude. This was the required ceremonial. Most women would sacrifice a clear advantage rather than this ceremonial.

Constance Altacher was delicately built. She had a feline face; black, piercing eyes set far apart, black, heavy hair, a somewhat *retroussé* nose; on the whole, not unattractive. Her voice was deep and gentle, and she had the habit of saying insignificant things significantly. That was tiring to the listener. She gazed persistently into the eyes of anyone to whom she was speaking, as though she wanted to nail him down with her gaze. Her whole bearing was pregnant with a constant, unspoken expression of her wretched lot. And that awakened an instinctive contradiction.

The report, written with an evidently practised pen, was as follows:

"My marriage to Edmond Altacher was contracted amidst the happiest circumstances. Even then Edmond was rich, and occupied an important industrial position; I came of a good family, had an ample dowry, and was not devoid of personal advantages. I had also enjoyed an excellent education, was mistress of several languages and for three winters I had attended lectures on philosophy.

"We founded a home that befitted our station, entertained freely, and went out a good deal into society. I can say that during the first years of our life together the harmony of our union was unclouded, and if we were not always turtle-doves, we were always good comrades.

"So far as I can recall, our first differences arose when the children became old enough to go to school. Our three daughters had been born at intervals of a year, so that they grew up almost together. I wanted the children to be taught at home; I had many reasons for this. First of all, I feared the danger of infectious diseases for them. I did not wish needlessly to expose to harm these beloved beings whom I had surrounded with such endless care and devotion. Since it was possible to protect them, I considered it my duty to do so. Further, I did not wish to expose the children to the moral influences of an average school. The ordinary disciplinary measures and methods revolted me. I am to a certain extent inclined to be aristocratic in feeling, and I have always had a horror of mass instruction. Perhaps I overestimated my daughters' abilities. But no one could blame me for wanting to save them from those common moulds in which all individuality is obliterated.

"Edmond did not share my opinions. He did not believe that our girls had any distinction of character or mind. I could not but forgive him this; for what do fathers know of their daughters? But he ended by denying that our children were in any respect different from those of other people. Yet I could adduce the testimony of many people whose opinions are worth while, that this was precisely the case. As a wife, as a mother, I had a deeper and acuter insight into the children than he could have. His professional cares and pre-occupations did not permit him to be with the children sufficiently. His relation to his children was an essentially playful one. A professional man wants his children to bother him as little as possible. If the world depresses him he sees

his home as through smoked glasses. Wherever the girls went they aroused admiration—sometimes by virtue of their musical ability, sometimes by their natural intelligence and easy gaiety. But Edmond considered people's admiration to be mere flattery, and my own justified pride he called parental delusion. I had definite pedagogical ideals; my friends approved of these, and experts came to me for advice; they assured me that my notions were uncommon ones. Edmond was the only one who refused to appreciate me; in his eyes I was an eccentric blue-stocking. Need I say that that annoyed me bitterly?

"Gradually it came to a point where he opposed me in all things, found fault with me uninterruptedly, and sought to rob me of my freedom of action in every direction. I repeat, in every direction, and not only in what concerned the children. He disapproved of my friends, disliked my frocks, distrusted my management of the house, objected to my choice of servants, and was annoyed by the books I read. The little essays on the history of art which I wrote in my rare hours of leisure, and which my friends unreservedly praised—these he denounced as the idle attempts of a dilettante. The fundamental trait of my nature is an enthusiasm for the great and beautiful things in the world. In this respect I have not changed since my girlhood, and it is this quality that has often helped me to endure the difficulties of life. Why was it that Edmond always strove to deprecate this quality in me, even in the presence of strangers?

"Why, I asked in my sorrow, why this unfairness? Why does he try to insinuate himself into the peaceful domain of my activities like an acid which, growing ever more concentrated, becomes ever more corrosive? I did not yet doubt his love, as I was, alas! forced to do as the years went on. But in the early days I had no reason to do so, at least, no deeper reason. I constantly forgave him his whims and his rudeness, and I can safely assert that I have known no second

instance of a wife so absolutely devoted to her husband as myself. And this obedient devotion in the least as well as in the most important affairs of life is to this day, after all that has happened, an ineradicable part of my nature. He and my children—I was concerned with nothing else, and interested myself in nothing else in the world. His well-being, his comfort, his success, his happiness, were the constant objects of my undivided solicitude.

“And how did he reward me? He seemed to distil a poison from the proofs of my love—the poison of ill-humour, distrust and self-isolation. Every disappointment which others inflicted upon him he visited upon me, whether it arose from public affairs or from the inadequacy of his assistants and employees. As time went on he failed me in the most superficial consideration, and seemed no longer to be conscious of our children’s surprised or saddened eyes. Was he aware of the thorn that he implanted in their souls? Did he realize how he smudged the surface of life for them, and distorted his natural image in their hearts?

“He began to avoid the house. He treated our common home as though it were a mere lodging where one passes the night. He took his meals at his club or with friends—with those whom he supposed to be his friends. He had leisure for the most trivial people; none for me, none for us. He was too weak to resist the importunate. But he had no perception of his own children’s needs. How was that to be explained in a man so just and clever, so highly cultured? I have passed innumerable nights of sleepless and agonized brooding over this riddle—in weeping, planning, and praying. Was I too weak to hold him? What was he striving for? What did he desire? What was the cause of his degeneration? I cannot call it otherwise; it was as though we had lost him. Many and many a time I asked him, begged him to explain. He was by no means silent; he adduced numerous reasons, but how could those reasons convince me? I saw that they were fictitious, and

invented merely for his justification. I reproached him with his insincerity. And at that point our discussions usually ended in outbursts of rage in him, of despair in me. One could not go on living like that.

"I had, of course, known for a long time that he was exposed to certain evil influences. I do not assert that his association with Ernevoldt and May Ernevoldt, and later with Luise Dercum, was the only cause of my unhappiness. The estrangement between Edmond and myself reached much farther back, and had its origin in a period that long preceded the appearance of these people. But after they entered his life, everything quickly grew worse. I cannot but attribute to them the chief guilt in the swift collapse of our married life, and it is they who must answer for it before God.

"It was about eighteen months ago that Edmond first mentioned the name of Ernevoldt. After that he frequently brought the man to our house. But since I could not conceal my dislike for him, and at once suspected that his friendship would have evil consequences, they took to meeting elsewhere, generally at Ernevoldt's house, where Edmond made the acquaintance of the former's sister, May. If I remember correctly, Ernevoldt had been introduced to my husband by a business friend. I know little of his character; I only know that he is a confirmed failure. His father is said to have been a Swede who married an impoverished noblewoman, was able to establish himself nowhere, and finally died in America. Ernevoldt himself has a wife and child. But he lets them live in want while he wallows in plenty. I have been told that he got rid of them legally. They live somewhere in a small South German town, and the woman has to earn her bread in the most menial way. Bernt Ernevoldt had been at various times war correspondent, agent, commercial traveller, and film director. Recently he has been living in a suburb here, in a rented villa, with his mother, two aunts, a brother, and his sister May.

"It is this woman who was destined to interfere so fatally in the life of my unhappy husband; this woman first, and afterwards the actress Dercum. For I believe her to be but a blind tool in the hands of Luise and of her brother. For the sake of human decency I shall make that assumption. Nor must I be blamed if what I am about to relate smacks of the sensationalism of cheap fiction. It is a sober fact that the complications of life surpass the imagination of the novelist. I will make an effort to describe the state of affairs as concisely as possible. For it is not easy to explain the intricate interdependence of events; it is not easy, and if my narrative arouses doubt I know I can bring proof enough to confound the most sceptical.

"As things were, I was not surprised that Ernevoldt, with his pleasing appearance and his ingratiating manners, won my husband's regard. To conquer people by his charm is almost the only trade of this semi-adventurer, who, at the age of thirty-five, still looks like a young athlete. Nor must it be forgotten that he came into Edmond's life at a time when the latter, now in his fiftieth year, had lost his grip on himself and on his relations with the world, and was undermined in his faith, or rather in his unfaith, but certainly in the value of his activity and its aims. He was frantically looking for a new foundation, for a new content for his life. I had known that a long time. But I was powerless to bring any remedy. My voice no longer reached his mind.

"Among other things, and probably under his sister's influence, Ernevoldt occupied himself a good deal with occultism and theosophy. Being a dilettante to the bone, his interest in these things probably had no solid basis. He told Edmond about a community, a certain group of people, of whom he was but the ignorant pupil, who had transcended the material and the earthly. He told him of his sister May, whom he described as one of these illuminati; he attributed to her visions and magic power. Edmond swallowed the bait.

His first meeting with May sealed his fate. From the very first he gave her his boundless confidence. She became his private secretary; soon her influence permeated all he did or thought. At this time Edmond's health began to fail. The serious affection of the heart from which he now suffers, and which forced him a fortnight ago to take refuge in a sanatorium, had its inception during that period. He had become, as I have said, unsure of himself in every respect; now he was suddenly enmeshed in that foggy, pseudo-religious, pseudo-mystical business. He became a member of the sect, and more and more deeply involved; what with hypnotizing conversations, and the reading of confused and confusing books and periodicals, he neglected everything else. This woman and her followers not only alienated him from his wife and children; their mystical airs, their impudent deceptions, induced him, who had been so sensible and thrifty, who had been so prudent in spite of his wealth, to finance Ernevoldt's questionable undertakings, to put large sums at his disposal, and, furthermore, to support the whole family. But it is my firm conviction that things would never have come to this pass without Luise Dercum. It is she whom I regard as the real demon of all these people, Edmond included. It is easy to jeer at these so-called fantastic notions of mine. Edmond has done so often enough. Others have done it. Let them! I see what I see, and know what I know.

"No one can deny that Fräulein Dercum has a scandalous past; her name has been dragged sufficiently through the newspapers to prove that. In Berlin they whisper the most unspeakable things about her. It is commonly reported that she succeeded in ruining her husband, the actor Arnold Keller, mentally and spiritually. It is credibly affirmed that it was she who caused him to be interned in an asylum for the insane. She simply considered that he had become a nuisance, and in order to get rid of him, there being no other way, she managed by subtle methods to get him certified

as insane, which resulted in his internment. People have protested vigorously in order to secure his release, but she opposes it with the plea that Keller has threatened her life. What a crowd! What a world! I had never dreamed that a breath of that world could blow upon our faces.

"I have been told that it was Ernevoldt who discovered the Dercum woman when she was seventeen, and was playing on a provincial stage somewhere in Bohemia. He was so enraptured by her talent that he had her educated at his expense. At all events, he has always been actively interested in her, and there can be no reasonable doubt as to the extreme intimacy of their relationship. But it was not until some months ago that she gave up her home in Berlin entirely, and moved here, and Ernevoldt introduced her into his family circle. It was there that Edmond met her from time to time. I say from time to time, for I don't know how often. It is clear that we are dealing with a woman who requires no lengthy preparation to throw out her nets and secure her prey. This may sound heartless and unjust. I am sorry. Has not everyone been heartless and unjust to me? The indignation in my breast may well drown all gentler emotions.

"Boundless as May's power over my husband was, or rather is—for these conditions have not changed—so is the power of this actress over May. The latter seems actually to regard Luise Dercum as a creature from another sphere. She executes her commands unresistingly, obeys her slightest nod, and it is not necessary to assume that she is privy to the selfish intentions of her brother and his friend. She is evidently, like all others who are in any way connected with Fräulein Dercum, under the sway of a personal magic. In her case that sway is so complete that she has been robbed of all power of self-determination. For this and other reasons I cannot help regarding May Ernevoldt as a creature at once hypersensitive and weak-willed. I have seen her several times, though never for long, and I believe that my judgment is a sound one.

"I am convinced that no illicit relations exist or ever have existed between May and my husband. I am persuaded of this not only by the solemn protestations of my husband, which I have no reason to doubt, but I am confirmed by my womanly intuition. But this precisely is the mysterious element; Edmond's helplessness in these toils is on that account only the more inexplicable to me and to other clear-thinking people. He is her helpless victim, and thus equally the victim of Ernevoldt and Luise Dercum. He does not suspect that he is the victim of these people. It is as though he were asleep and dreaming. He feels that all is well, while they suck his blood. Until the end of the autumn I nursed the hope that he would awaken and grasp his humiliating situation. On his birthday, last October, I adjured him in the most passionate terms; I appealed to his honour; I spoke of the sorrow and shame of our daughters, who are now too old not to be aware of their father's inexplicable defection. He listened to me in sombre silence, and stayed away from home for a week. Then, several days before he went to the sanatorium, he suddenly brought up the question of divorce. For the first time. I was thunderstruck. Divorce at the end of twenty years of marriage? From the man whom I loved above all things, and who was ill, perhaps incurably so? I was not conscious of any guilt, nor did he desire, by his own assertion, to marry anyone else. What was going on in his mind? Was it not justifiable actually to believe in an accursed bewitchment? But who shall describe my indignation and my despair when, three days later, I was credibly informed that he was on the point of executing a plan by means of which he was to turn over to May Ernevoldt one-fourth of all he possessed, in order that she might, even during the remainder of his life, be secure from all material cares. It was now that I determined to act. The time had passed when I could calmly watch events and let them take their course. What was this May Ernevoldt to him, or to me, or to my daughters, that she should profit

by his work and hold the just possessions of my family? Could one imagine anything more absurd? Also, I had had my fill of suffering and humiliation. This senseless and frivolous waste had to be prevented. I thank God that there is still time to prevent it. It would be a slap in the face for me and my children, and an unparalleled exposure. I summoned a family council. All my kinsmen agreed that if my husband continued to insist on a divorce, I was to grant it to him on condition that he bound himself legally to abandon all thought of this gift. In case of his refusal it would be necessary—nor will I shrink from this necessity, bitterly as my heart and soul rebel—to have him declared mentally incompetent and petition the court for a trustee of the estate. I will not see the triumph of those who desire to profit by the physical and spiritual weakness of an otherwise noble character. In addition, the three oldest members of my family have declared that they are prepared to seek Edmond out and attempt to persuade my sorely and unhappily infatuated husband to give up all idea of divorce. They will seek to reach his conscience, and to open his eyes to the ultimate consequences of his purpose. This step will be taken as soon as the physicians in charge of him give their permission. If that last plea remains fruitless, God help me and my daughters."

With deeply furrowed brow, his piercing glance still on the last page he had read, Laudin sat there motionless. The ringing of the telephone startled him as though it had been the blow of a hammer.

Luise Dercum lived in a spacious studio flat which occupied almost the whole upper floor of a new building in the centre of the town. Yet it was a rather silent street, and the house

stood among rococo mansions that had either been abandoned or turned into Government and administrative offices. The lift carried Laudin upstairs, and while still outside the oaken front-door he heard laughter and the hubbub of many voices.

He was unpleasantly impressed. According to Luise Dercum's last note he had expected her to receive him alone. The occasion that led him to her must have seemed of little importance to her.

Yet he hesitated to turn and go away.

After he had given his card to the maid he entered a wide, lofty room which would ordinarily have been lit by the windows on either side and the skylight. On this dark December afternoon the windows, as well as the walls, were hung like the interior of a chapel, with reddish-brown hangings of velvet brocade. There were several standard lamps with shades that seemed as large as tents. In spite of these the room lay in a vague and probably intentional twilight, in which Laudin's eye distinguished first of all only carpets, tables, divans, glaring pictures on the walls, and the figures of six or eight men and women.

One of these figures detached itself from the purple background and approached him vivaciously. At the same moment the other guests, their faces hidden in clouds of cigarette smoke, turned curiously toward him, and for a few seconds the chatter and the laughter ceased. He at once recognized the deep, metallic, quick, and curiously husky voice. But her features seemed strange to him, and her figure smaller. He felt a cool, mobile, muscular hand; he heard rapidly articulated words. He bowed.

Luise Dercum made the introductions. Among these names that meant nothing to him two that met his ear made him look up: Ernevoldt and May Ernevoldt. He saw a tall, rather thick-set, and already somewhat obese man, whose beardless face might have been called handsome. But when one regarded these energetic features more closely one suddenly had an

impression of sloth and unintelligence. And he saw a slender little figure with a narrow head and silken hair that fell in sudden curls only to the shoulders, and which was so blond that it had almost the effect of spun glass.

Already Luise Dercum had left him. She stood beside the tea-table, giving directions to the maid. Then she turned to a young fellow-actress, and spoke to her insistently. Two men, an actor and a journalist, whose names Laudin had already forgotten, joined the women, and he heard Luise laugh. She threw back her head, and one could see her brown throat. Her laugh was sonorous, and had the infectious quality of laughter that comes from the very heart. The next moment she was standing beside a heavily rouged woman who sat on an arm-chair near the fireplace, and bending over her. The Fortuny silk shawl that covered her shoulders made her look like a great, mobile, fantastic flower. A new guest appeared, at whose entrance she exclaimed with delight. It was a man well on in years, foppishly dressed, and wearing an affected expression, whom she addressed as Baron. He treated her with confidential familiarity, and whispered in her ear, whereupon she slapped the back of his hand. Seeing Ernevoldt, the Baron went up to him with outstretched arms. Laudin heard him asking after the state of health of Consul Altacher; several times he heard him say, "Our poor, dear friend." Ernevoldt answered with a smile. Laudin observed that he had a curious habit of smiling; he smiled at stated intervals, without any apparent reason, whether anyone addressed him or not, whether he was alone or talking to someone else. It was a good-natured, dreamy, and at the same time shame-faced smile, which on the whole impressed one as rather simple-minded.

Laudin stood aside. He was both embarrassed and annoyed. He was accustomed neither to such society nor to such a situation. Tea had been served. He stood there, his cup in his hand, and seemed to reflect. He heard again that low

swift voice, that voice which had so charmed him from the stage, and which alone had seemed to remain true to itself, and when a young man asked him a question in a familiar tone—they all seemed to insist on a strange familiarity, almost as though reserve was something indecent—he answered absent-mindedly and looked at his watch.

At that moment he felt a hand upon his arm. Another example of their familiarity, he thought, and turned with a frown. But it was Luise. "Won't you join me for a few minutes?" she asked, and he could see that she had deep brown, gleaming eyes whose glance was violent and impatient. He bowed. She preceded him. Someone cried: "Come here a minute, Lu!" She waved her hand and said: "Later."

They entered a small room. A lamp with a red and yellow glass shade hung from the ceiling. This room, too, was twilit. Luise did not close the door. "I didn't remember that people were coming in for tea." She turned to Laudin, and that violent, urgent glance struck him again. "You must forgive me. We can talk here. What is it precisely, Doctor? Can I serve you in any way?"

"I have tried, Fräulein Dercum, to give you a brief explanation in my letter," Laudin said courteously but dryly. "I am here on behalf of, and at the request of, my friend Egid Fraundorfer. You can realize that he is not in a state to endure an interview which could not fail to evoke and renew emotions of the most tragic kind."

"Yes, I remember your having written that," said Luise Dercum, almost irritably, and she lifted her head and looked searchingly at Laudin. "What am I to do? What do you want of me?"

Laudin answered: "We are in a rather painful position in regard to yourself, Fräulein Dercum. We are strangely helpless; my friend is in a confusion of torturing suspicion, self-reproach, and gloomy introspection. The only human

being to whom his whole heart clung has been suddenly and fearfully snatched away. Perhaps I need not tell you what high hopes died with Nicolas—not only for his father, but for us all. Further, the case is rendered more grievous by the fact that Fraundorfer, a character of a strangely stubborn kind, was driven to a certain secrecy concerning his love for his son; it was a case of emotional self-consciousness, almost indistinguishable from emotional paralysis. The result is a delirium of despair, a silent misery that drags through the sleepless nights. What was repressed during the years bursts irresistibly forth. We have believed, and still believe, that you can shed some light on the tragedy for us, on its motives, at the very least. Nicolas had won your friendship. It was perfectly evident that he regarded you with a devout adoration. Hence you can hardly take it in ill part if I ask you for some elucidation, for some light in our darkness, provided that you are willing and able to help us.”

Again that penetrating glance; then a gloomy wrinkling of the brows. She clasped her hands behind her back like a man, which gave her head and shoulders a determined air. “Won’t you sit down?” she said. He waited for her to be seated, but she remained standing, so he pushed the chair away again. Twice she paced the length of the room. In her bold and violent eyes there gleamed something like vexation. When she passed the open door again she closed it, and the murmur of the other voices died. She stood with her shoulders against the door, and leaned back her head with its thick, brown hair until her body was more tense than ever.

Without any gestures, with that deep music in her voice which compelled a hearing, she began: “In order that there may be no misunderstanding, I shall tell you the whole story. So far as I remember I made the boy’s acquaintance at some special festivity arranged by a colleague of mine. He played the piano, and it was his music that brought us together; he came to see me, rarely at first, then more frequently,

during the last period every day. Of course I soon saw that the boy was on fire. And then one day the natural confession came. I made it quite clear to him that I could not be his. I told him that he was still a child, that I was an experienced woman who needed peace and order in her life. My twenty-four years had been so full that they seemed far more in number. He wouldn't see that. He was not to be reasoned with. He was really a great nuisance, but what was I to do? I could hardly forbid him the house. I wasn't his governess. It's not my business to make philosophers of the young people who come here. And many come. I need to have people around me. I love their society. I dislike loneliness. Besides, don't imagine that I wasn't fond of the boy. But he finally became so unmanageable and exacting that I had to say, quite brutally: 'Listen, Nicolas, either you're content that we should be good friends or I'll simply have to have you turned out. I've got something better to do than to waste my time in interminable scenes with a kid like you.' I don't want to bore you, Doctor, with what happened afterwards. He declared that our friendship was at an end, and yet he came back and made scenes, and then begged my pardon, and hung around for hours in front of my dressing-room in the theatre and tried to pump my colleagues about my movements. I'll simply tell you what happened on that last Sunday. That will interest you chiefly."

Laudin nodded. A magic proceeded from that face, a magic from that voice. Everything that she said was admirably clear; each word was firmly placed, and seemed to be chosen with a kind of sovereign freedom. In ordinary life it is rare for people to be able to express themselves, to make use of the right word and the right inflection of the voice and the right sense of measure; it is rare for the voice to rise and fall agreeably without becoming hoarse or careless or slothful. Laudin was too experienced in the use of words not to appreciate such qualities. Perhaps he even enjoyed them, and found

it difficult not to forget the sadness of his mission here. Under his bushy moustache there almost flickered that smile by which a master salutes his fellow.

Until now Luise Dercum had preserved a complete composure. Now, at the recollection of that fatal evening, she seemed unable to conceal her excitement. Once more she walked up and down the room, took the beautiful shawl from her shoulders, wrapped herself in it again, glanced at the ceiling, smoothed her hair with her hand and finally continued: "It was after the Sunday *matinée* that he appeared. I was tired and resting in bed, and could not receive him. He talked and quarrelled a long while with my maid; then suddenly he rushed off. That night at eight o'clock he reappeared. I had friends to dinner. I went into the anteroom and said to him: 'If you'll behave sensibly, come in and join us. Otherwise, you'd better go.' " A strange look came into her eyes. "After all, he had dedicated a song to me, and I wanted to be kind to him. He promised to behave himself, and came in. All the evening he sat there, as though self-absorbed, and uttered not a syllable, and grew paler and paler. The others left. He stayed. I hated to see that, because I foresaw that there would be another scene. No sooner were we alone than he grasped my hands and said: 'We must get married, Lu.' I couldn't help laughing. 'Why, you little fool,' I said, 'in the first place, you know I am married, and in the second place, I wouldn't commit that folly over again.' 'You must get a divorce,' he said; 'I can't live without you and I won't.' Good heavens, what was I to answer? The boy was eighteen. There was no room for any serious discussion. So I said: 'Get out of here, child, and go to bed, and when you've had a good sleep perhaps you'll be more sensible.' He stood before me with uplifted arms, and begged and wept and threatened until I lost patience and left the room. I went to bed, but carefully locked the door of my room; in his madness he was capable of anything. But I couldn't sleep, and after an hour

I thought he must be gone, and went back into the studio to fetch a book. I found him there sitting at a table and writing. I wasn't very friendly, I confess. 'What the deuce are you writing there at this time of night?' I asked him. He got up and said, 'I've finished.' He gave me the letter and left. I went back into my bedroom, and suddenly the whole thing disgusted me so that I rang for my maid and said to her that she was never to admit young Fraundorfer to the house again. Next morning, or, rather, at noon, when I woke, my maid came in with the terrible news. An acquaintance of mine, a conductor, had telephoned. Then, I confess, I spent a couple of hours that I shall never forget. And since that day a shadow seems to hover over me, and a fatality darkens my path."

She whispered these last words, and the fingers of her loosely hanging hands played nervously with the fringes of the shawl. Her face had grown pale, and her eyes had become shadows. She breathed deeply. The telling of the story, which had constantly accelerated in tempo so that the last words, all but that final whispered sentence, had poured forth like a cataract, had obviously exhausted her. She stood there with averted eyes, as though she wanted to speak no more and hear no more.

Considerately, Laudin let several minutes pass. Then he asked hesitatingly: "And that letter? May I go so far in my indiscretion as to beg you to communicate to me the contents of that letter, or even to lend it to me for a short time? Consider, my dear lady, that it was his last communication, his last utterance. . . ."

The actress shrugged her shoulders. "The letter has disappeared," she answered. "I put it away that night and haven't found a trace of it since. I didn't even read it. I could imagine its contents; I have since looked for it everywhere; it is as though a ghost had been here and had fetched it."

Laudin regretted the inexplicable disappearance of the

letter. Gently he waved aside the theory of the ghost. Remembering his interview with another woman, as far removed from this one, to be sure, as earth is from heaven, he was yet unpleasantly impressed by the absurd coincidence that here, too, a ghost was accused of having stolen an important document.

"I am most cordially grateful to you for what you have been good enough to tell me," he said with an inclination of his head. "Even though the mystery is not entirely elucidated, I feel that my mission here is at an end."

"Mystery? What about?" Luise Dercum asked and looked at him with large eyes.

"One mystery is this: On Friday morning Nicolas conducted the rehearsal of his choral work with a passion and an absorption which made the deepest possible impression on the interpretative artists under him. Several of them have since confirmed this report. On Saturday, on the other hand, at the next rehearsal, he was absent-minded and disturbed, in a degree that no one could fail to observe. Now Nicolas was the reverse of moody. I have rarely known anyone with such an equable temper. So I am bound to assume that this catastrophic change of mood took place between Friday and Saturday, that is, certainly before Sunday."

"I am sorry that I can't give you the missing links in your chain of evidence," said Luise Dercum, and her figure seemed suddenly to take on an added slenderness and severity. "That chapter in my life is finished. I have burdens enough. I feel no responsibility; I will have none imputed to me. My mournful recollection of him is my own. You cannot expect me to expiate a guilt thrust on me from without. Love knows no compulsion—least of all the compulsion of a revolver held against its forehead. Nor must I let ghosts trouble me, else I should be lost every time I open my eyes. I belong to no one. I belong to myself. I belong to all."

Silently Laudin lowered his head. It had been a vehement

outburst of righteous self-assertion and of pride. One could not but bow to that. The lawyer felt a wind from a world of the unconditioned which convinced him that there were no compromises to be made here, nor half-sincere reconciliations, nor any half-truths to be talked to death with the conventional vocabulary of five to six hundred words. All that was spoken here had the sharp edge of glass cut with diamonds—it was measured, complete, perfect. Nothing was left him save respectfully to withdraw. Luise Dercum gave him her hand in farewell, and out of the depths of her repressed feeling she looked at him with a smile that reminded him, almost to the point of terror, of that photograph of hers out of which truth and innocence had seemed to speak to him so triumphantly.

She took him to the outer door without passing through the studio. As far as the second flight of stairs below he still heard the voices and the laughter of her guests.

25

Two days afterwards, about four o'clock, just as he was dictating a letter to Brigitte Hartmann, who had missed him twice at the office, and had seemed very much excited on that account, the attendant brought in a card. It was that of Luise Dercum. He was astonished, and interrupted his dictation, sending the typist out of the room.

In the door, held wide open by the attendant, appeared Luise in a mink coat and white gloves, her face rosy with the winter air, and strangely radiant. She came up to him vivaciously and begged him for the privilege of wasting half an hour of his time. With almost ostentatious courtesy Laudin brought her a chair. He assured her that he was utterly at her service. He asked her if she wouldn't remove her coat; the room was

hot, he admitted, but lawyers must be kept warm; they suffered more from the cold than ordinary people.

She slipped off her coat and let it fall on her chair. She had on a dark gray walking-dress; the colour gave her a distinguished charm. Her lips had their natural hue.

In spite of her elegance, which was a shade too new to be entirely genuine, there was an indescribable something about her, not explicable even to the trained perception of Laudin, by which she seemed more like a disguised boy than like a woman. It was not in her dress. It was in her bearing, in the swiftness of her gestures, in the slenderness of her figure, and in a certain frank openness of countenance.

This bearing of hers was utterly different from that which she had shown Laudin in her own home. It matters considerably whether someone comes to you and wants something of you, or you go to him and ask something of him. And she evidently had a precise conception of this difference, which she made no attempt to conceal.

She avoided preliminaries. The reason for her coming was a simple one. His personality had inspired her with confidence. She belonged to that order of persons who need several days for the impressions which they receive to reach their intelligence. For all her cleverness she was as slow in judgment as a peasant-woman. She wanted to know whether he was willing to guide and represent her; the thing she was concerned with was her marriage with the actor Keller. A dismal, depressing, tormenting affair.

Laudin observed that, so far as he had heard, the marriage had been made in Berlin, and that they had lived in Berlin. This knowledge, he said, in apologetic parenthesis, was due to her fame. Any legal proceedings, therefore, since her husband was still living in Berlin, would have to be taken in Berlin. It would consequently be necessary to employ a Berlin advocate.

She spoke hastily and shook her hand. "I have a lawyer. I have three lawyers. They're all idiots. I beg your pardon, but these professional gentlemen drive one simply desperate. They drag themselves along step by step, and none has the courage ever to take a leap. One can't live with such people, and can't work with them. In a book I skip the pages that bore me. Don't you?"

"My whole profession is, I fear, based on boredom. You are very impetuous, *Fräulein Dercum*," said Laudin indulgently.

"I know I am," she admitted. "But I don't want you to put me off with forms of speech, Doctor Laudin. If I can't have your assistance, at least give me your advice. Don't tell me that I was deceived by the intuition that pointed you out to me as not only a man but a human being. Don't imagine for a moment that I am trying to flatter you. All my friends call me the hooligan. But it is equally true that I enthusiastically recognize true superiority of heart and spirit wherever I find it. But I must really find it, you understand." She laughed. She bent back her head, and he saw that slender brown throat as he had seen it two days ago. It was pleasant to hear her laugh. It was like an enchanting surprise.

He mutely thanked her for permitting him to feel that he was the object of her enthusiastic appreciation. A gesture of his hand invited her to tell her story. He offered her a cigarette. She talked while she smoked. She crossed her legs and bent her body forward. Her whole attitude bespoke her confidence; her glance was assured and open.

She had married Arnold Keller to protect herself against the implacable pursuit of a man who, soon afterwards, met his death in a falling aeroplane. In those days she had been as inexperienced as a child. She had been warned against Keller, but she had not heeded the warnings. He had amused her enormously; he had been so extraordinarily funny that

she had imagined that living with him would be an uninterrupted pleasure. Furthermore, she hadn't had the slightest notion of responsibility in those days; she had thought of marriage as merely pooling one's salary with someone else's, and having someone to complain to if the director or the stage manager happened to be impudent. She thought the word frivolous couldn't be used at all to describe her state of mind at the time; this couldn't, in fact, be understood without taking her youth into consideration, the story of her earliest years, which she intended to tell him some day: the story of lightness floating up from the monstrous heaviness of life—a soap-bubble rising out of dirty swill. Ah, yes. But the lovely bubble is aware of its own fragility; it glitters and waits for its inevitable end. . . .

She threw her cigarette away. She smiled and drew herself up with an elastic movement.

Arnold Keller turned out to be jealous to the point of mania. His whole talent was one of illusion. Even his ability as a comedian was based on the illusion of nullity. The process was something like this: he was so frightened at the thought of meeting himself that he tried by constant grimaces to distort himself beyond any likeness of himself. In this connection Luise had made the most astonishing observations: comedians are the most pitiful creatures in the world. Their whole life is a flight from themselves. She seemed not to realize that this description could really be applied to all members of her profession.

She wondered if Laudin could fathom the depth of her martyrdom. To recover from such a fate as hers and to be able to forget it, life must simply be regarded as a lottery. Well, she was grateful that she had a talent for forgetfulness. She was born anew every morning, born out of the old day which died at that new birth.

She lit another cigarette. Laudin was fascinated by her gestures, and kept in suspense by following her speech from

sentence to sentence. Language suddenly seemed like a bunch of wild flowers.

If jealousy is a disease, it destroys anyone who is its object—generally the woman. An individual so afflicted has no eyes or ears for anything except his hallucinations, and spies and listens and seeks and creeps and rages. Tenderness and rage are one. He will tear you out of your sleep because he suspects that you are dreaming of a rival. He smashes the window because the postman has brought you a letter; then he falls on his knees and howls when you show him that the letter was your dressmaker's bill. If you look at people in a restaurant he suddenly acts like a mad dog. Madness, cruelty, beseechings for forgiveness, oaths, such was the rule, the content of her days. Finally, he was horrified at himself, and took refuge in cocaine. Then the lowest hell was reached. The second vice joined the first, and both attained incredible proportions. If this had gone on nothing would have been left of her but a whimpering heap of bones. She succeeded in having him confined in a sanatorium. This, at the end of three years of torment. That didn't mean that she was rid of him, Heaven help her! By apparent recovery he might regain his liberty at any moment, and her old burden would be upon her back. Hence she could hardly draw a breath of relief, even while he was under lock and key. She had scarcely escaped him when her first great successes came to her. It was as though he had chained her with diabolical chains. Of course, gossip reported that she had caused him to be locked up. It was easy for envy to buy up a few yellow journalists who were willing to describe her as a fury because she thought a madman ought to be put where he belonged. But as long as he was where he belonged, she couldn't get a divorce from him, because the law was so queer as not to permit it. Yet if he were out in the world a divorce would be a mere illusion, because he wouldn't leave her alone, and no one could force him to do so. A nice

situation! She wanted to know if Dr. Laudin had any advice to offer.

He was silent. He was accustomed to order in his mind what he was told and to weigh the arguments.

"Possibly one could offer the man a settlement," he said, joining the tips of his fingers.

"He's not interested in money. He's quite Spartan-like."

"I'll have to think it over and get in touch with a colleague in Berlin."

"Yes, do," Luise Dercum said quickly, and got up. "At this moment I don't care about taking any steps. The witches' cauldron is still seething too violently for me to want to dip my hand in. I think the time for legal action hasn't come yet. All I wanted you to tell me was whether, theoretically at least, justice could be obtained in such a case as mine. Or am I condemned to be the prey of this mad creature till my death? Is that the fate to which your laws condemn me?"

She looked at him challengingly, full of scorn and contempt. He lowered his eyes as though he were aware of his inadequacy. "Justice!" He shrugged his shoulders. "You mustn't seek justice from me. The best I can do for you is to lead you through dark alleys with a flickering lamp so that you do not drop into unsuspected caverns and trapdoors."

"And that is all?"

"All!"

"And that satisfies you?"

"It's a case of having to resign myself."

"Frightful!"

"I could tell you a good deal about that, dear lady."

He helped her on with her coat. She seemed to be reflecting. At the door she turned round once more and asked, as though the thought had occurred to her suddenly: "Aren't you Frau Altacher's lawyer, too?"

He said that he was.

"I should have liked to talk to you a little about that affair.

But I don't know if it's proper, or if you would consider it so. I'm afraid, anyhow, that I've bothered you long enough. . . ."

"If you please, *Fräulein Dercum*," said Laudin with some reserve, and offered her a chair anew.

But she remained standing. She looked at him searchingly, and a mysterious smile played about her expressive lips.

"In that case, too, I should have liked to appeal to justice, had not the folly of such an appeal already been pointed out to me. Or if I were facing a friend, now, Doctor Laudin; if you, so famous and so clever, were my friend and not the unapproachable head of a firm, with all sorts of considerations and previous obligations, I would say to you: Take the picture that has been presented to you and lay it aside for an hour and impartially examine another picture, the reverse of this, which you ought to see. After all, that would be interesting, wouldn't it?"

"I don't quite understand. . . ."

"Well, I can make myself clear. Constance has composed a written accusation. This is no secret that I am giving away. Not only did she talk about it everywhere, but she passed the manuscript around among her acquaintances. It happens that, really without knowing the circumstances, really out of the depths of an inner urge, her husband, too, has composed a little memorial—a little account of their marriage, and the experiences connected with it. This document is in the keeping of my friend *Ernevoldt*. I wish you could read it or hear it read. It would be worth your while. *Ernevoldt* keeps it very quiet, of course. But if I ask him, especially on your behalf, he won't hesitate to let us have it. What do you say that proposal?"

"Since it is your wish, and since presumably the reading of the manuscript will not bind me or commit me in any way. I shall be glad to read it."

"That's nice of you, although you formulate it very carefully. Don't be afraid. We won't violate your professional

holy of holies. But what I like is confrontation. The drama consists of speech and counterspeech. And I am curious to know what you will say, both as a man and as a jurist. I am a woman, and full of curiosity, and once in a while I like to smash the shell and get at the nut. Could you call on me after the performance to-morrow night, at ten-thirty?"

Laudin promised to do so.

When he was alone again he looked almost like someone whose hat had been blown away by the wind.

26

When Laudin entered, Egyd Fraundorfer was sitting at the piano. With high, hunched back he was sitting on a little music-stool, his head nearly on the keyboard, and playing with one finger a melody which he was deciphering with difficulty from a page of manuscript music. His little dog was crouching beside him and following the activity of his gigantic master with attentive astonishment.

Frau Blum had discovered that the manuscript had belonged to Nicolas, and was a sketch of a composition that he had made shortly before his death. She confided to Laudin that Fraundorfer passed hours and hours trying to decipher it and to express its melodic motifs on the piano.

"You wouldn't believe how God-damned hard it is to play the piano if you don't know how to play," growled Fraundorfer. Then he got up with a groan and went with Laudin into the next room. "I thought all you had to do was to sit down and be a Busoni. But that's the way it is with everything. Vanity can be sustained only by complete ignorance. Retire to your chamber, Herr Schmidt. Sit down, Laudin."

He drew the curtains, put whisky and soda on the table, pushed the electric lamp from the middle to the edge, lit a

cigar, and, puffing, faced Laudin. He indicated the room with a wave of his arm. "What do you say to the cleanliness that now reigns in our house? Do you notice the tyranny of the broom wielded by Frau Blum? She is a fury whose mission it is to exterminate dirt. Not a bad woman, in other respects."

Laudin smiled. "I see. But why is your face covered with stubble? Don't you shave any more? Or do you feel better in this condition?"

Fraundorfer rubbed his chin. "Does my young harvest bother you? You associate too much with smooth articles. You cannot serve two masters. You can't learn how to play the piano and shave too. Especially if music gets on your nerves and if you possess only one razor, into which the tooth of time has bitten. I'm giving the razor a rest. It seems to me that we use all the common objects about us far too much. We never give them a chance to rest. If they do rest and consult their souls, they start to function again. That holds true not only of razors but of boots, collar-studs, cigar-cutters and pens. You try it, Laudin. All the things that in our folly we consider unconscious will rise up and bless you. In my history of human stupidity I have devoted an entire section to this discovery. The chapter is called: 'Concerning the Justified Resistance of the Objective.' "

He went on discussing this theme, and spoke, too, of the revengefulness and actual revenge of things which manifested itself, for instance, in the form of rust or stains on books, or tears in fabrics, or the sudden refusal of locks to close or open. All these phenomena were the expression of the spirit of the thing in question, the expression of its dissatisfaction at misuse or over-use, in short, the rebellion of the slave. Finally, Laudin, well knowing that Fraundorfer was only waiting for it, abruptly changed the subject, and gave an account of his interview with Luise Dercum.

He was able to reproduce what she had told him quite literally. He made no comment.

From time to time Fraundorfer shook his head. When Laudin had finished, he said, as though shovelling the words out with his protruded lower lip: "A nice little fairy-tale. But only a fairy-tale."

"What motive would there be for inventing stories?" Laudin asked with a frown. "Am I the sort of man for whose benefit one invents them?"

"Bah!" said Fraundorfer. "You're not the first, you won't be the last. In that region you've no ground under your feet. The brilliant plumage dazzles you. The improbable is not the visible. It lies within, in the mechanism itself. One hears the wheels crunch and the screws rattle."

"I undertake to deny that Luise Dercum withheld the truth from me," said Laudin, and laid the palm of his hand upon the table. "I absolutely deny it. I am not even ready to admit that she has veiled the truth. I am quite sure of my impressions. If you appeal to that experience which may guide one aright in ninety cases out of a hundred, I, on the other hand, appeal to an intuition which has never deceived me in even one case out of a hundred. The world which we are touching is a strange one. True. Stranger, perhaps, to me than to you. It is an unsound world in many respects; it has the phosphorescence of decay; its moral equilibrium is not our own. Granted. But this woman is like an arrow which cleaves that world and never touches it. I am not without respect for prejudices. Prejudices arise often enough from the witnessing of bloody wounds that have actually been inflicted upon the body of society. In these low levels upon which we live, repute and character are not easily to be divided. But one must respect the free judgment, too. Appearances are undeniable evidence. I am willing to confess that I cannot altogether grasp this extraordinary woman, and have as yet no path to the heart of her mystery. Nevertheless, this is no reason for a negative judgment; nor is the fact that she belongs to a stratum which, generally speaking, arouses distrust. One should rather

exert oneself doubly and not forget that one is dealing with a creature of genius."

Fraundorfer regarded his friend attentively. "H-m," he said, after a long pause. Then, after another pause, he said: "And how about this?" He took out the page of music which he had been trying to play and which he had rolled up and stuck into his coat pocket. He unrolled it and handed it to Laudin and pointed to a place in the midst of the notes where the following words were clearly to be read: "Ah, Lu, how can I ever thank you for having listened to me?" And a few lines below was written: "Sweetest, this is your glorious body that I embrace . . ."

"Well!" asked Fraundorfer, with a grim smile at Laudin's silence.

Beginning on his forehead and creeping down his face, a yellowish pallor glided over Laudin's features. "I hope that you don't take that as a reliable proof." He uttered the words with difficulty. "At the first moment it takes one's breath away. But it is a phantasmagoria of love, the dream of a passionate soul that assumes its wishes to have found their fulfilment. Young artists are accustomed to identify yearning and reality. That is it. That must be it."

"You insist, at any price, that their relations were platonic, my transmogrified Dyskolos?"

Laudin rose. His slender height seemed to take on an added nobility in contrast to the crouching mass of fat that was his friend. He spoke: "Give me one reason why that woman should have lied to me? She is free. She is independent. She has nothing and no one to fear. What is there to hide? What reason is there for silence? What is there in such a confession that could dishonour her or put her to shame? Such inhibitions are disappearing even among the conventional middle classes. Why, then, should she mystify us in regard to a matter that is of no particular importance in her eyes? Merely for the lie's sake? That's nonsense."

With half-open eyes, his cigar clenched between his bared teeth, Fraundorfer called: "Herr Schmidt, come here a minute!"

Morosely the little dog left his basket and trotted to Fraundorfer's chair. "Pay attention, Herr Schmidt," his master said, and with a snort bent over toward the animal. "Pay attention, now. Our friend here is wholly ignorant of the true character of lying. He knows neither its power nor its significance! He is aware neither of its shameless self-sufficiency nor of its eel-like slipperiness. All he knows is the common or garden variety of lies, which can be aimed at and hit at a distance of three paces, the actional lie, the spatial lie, the dæmonic lie, the liar's lie! Now, what do you say, Herr Schmidt? There are still children left in the world! Full-grown, famous, hardened lawyers are still in the conceptual kindergarten, and babble: 'Now I lay me down to sleep . . .'"

"Egyd!" Laudin was startled; he drew back. "Are you drunk?"

"All right, all right," Fraundorfer said soothingly and threw his dead cigar on the floor. "I was only trying to relieve myself. It was only a variation on the G string. An apocalyptic ride. By the way, did you ask this genius of yours about the burn?"

"It was hardly possible, under the circumstances," Laudin answered almost reprovingly, "to put so intimate a question. You seem to see the situation in a wholly false light. Moreover, the way to her is by no means closed. On the contrary. She has asked my advice in a matter that concerns her closely. I am sure to see her several times again, and if there are any further researches in our affair that I can honourably make, I shall be glad to do so."

Fraundorfer nodded. His head sank down upon his breast. He seemed to be asleep. Herr Schmidt trotted back to his little shelter. A profound vexation took hold of Laudin. He remained only a little while longer. When he took his leave, the hand that Fraundorfer gave him was limp and nerveless.

Ernevoldt and May Ernevoldt were already in the studio when Laudin arrived. Luise Dercum sent May to fetch a book; this was evidently done by a previous and mutual agreement. Ernevoldt gave Luise a manuscript. Laudin moved his chair out of the light of the lamp and heard the actress's marvellous voice read as follows:

"Rarely, I suppose, has a man entered upon marriage with expectations as high as mine were. I regarded Constance not only as the builder of my home and the guardian of my comfort; wishes and assurance seemed to be based on an even higher security. Although only in my thirtieth year, I was to some extent already satiated with the world. Concerned with important undertakings and extensive affairs, I had seen too much of selfishness, of evil, of mean ambition, and had often been their victim, so that marriage presented itself to me in the nature of a fortress in which I should be secure against the harshness and the tumult of the world. In this essential respect I was soon to recognize my error, although at first I had no ground for any more serious complaint. After all, the first years of a marriage do not give its issue, but at most its direction. Two personalities must first have a chance to develop through one another, even though this process involves friction; both must show consideration, and have a right to demand it; the common life is still new, one individual life is gladly confided to the other. The man feels himself to be the master, and no one questions the fact. The soul and mind of the woman are employed in the development of her personality, and it is only later that one gains a view of the path which she will take when her development is complete. It is at this point that men commonly make their

great mistake of imperfect guidance or lack of intervention at the critical hour. And one day they are amazed to see beside them a human being utterly different from the woman they have seen in her quiet half-lethargy.

"What I am trying to say is this: that in the middle strata of society, unless, indeed, qualities and passions show sharp and immediate contrasts, the true success of a marriage can be judged, even by the two people most concerned, only after the lapse of a considerable period. In Constance I early discovered an inclination, which I can only call a greedy craving, to surround herself always with swarms of people, so-called society people. She loved to be the centre of a circle, the object of its admiration. She loved to shine, not, perhaps, by virtue of her clothes and jewels, but by her intellect and culture. She was well read, and valued this quality above all things. And if I say so-called society people, I should add that they were always people of a certain standard of education, scholars, lawyers, physicians, writers and artists with whom she persistently filled our house. These associations, one would think, were not open to any criticism, and her ambition was no vulgar or superficial one. But a point is reached when intellectual interests no longer express a true inward reality, and amount only to restlessness and a superficial zeal that gives one an excuse to neglect one's duties. It establishes relations where none would naturally exist. A revolt against the supposed banality of daily life which arises from vanity and self-deception leads to a breaking of all proper rules and a denial of all sane necessities. I was not thinking merely of slippered ease when I came home in need of self-recollection, of peace, of friendly counsel, and found my house, evening after evening, full of guests. Yet it was difficult to call a halt. If a man merely seeks to protect his essential rights, he is at once stigmatized as a tyrant and a dog in the manger. If, on the other hand, he lets things go, the merely vexatious soon becomes an intolerable burden. In the first

admonition lies the seed of discord, and the first contradiction marks the beginning of complete division. When looks and expressions are no longer heeded, happiness is gone beyond recall. It is strange how all our human defects arise from our unswerving fixation on some fundamental characteristic. It was so in this case. The deliberate and artificially heightened tensions of the mind led to an undervaluing, and later to a complete disdain of the daily round of life. The household creaked like unoiled machinery. The servants knew there was no guiding hand, and had no respect for a mistress who alternated between offensive arrogance and capricious condescension, between stubbornness and weakness. But the welfare of a house depends upon the people who serve that house. There is an atmosphere of mere routine; and no woman can hope to rule her little kingdom if she does nothing more than give orders to her servants and pay them. Constance was always a prey to the comfortable delusion that if anyone was in her service she had bought that person body and soul. Hence every little failure or neglect at once aroused her measureless rage. It recently became apparent that even kindly people soon showed her the bad side of their characters, as though affected by an evil spell. She herself suffered from this, and could not explain it; and if I, who knew the cause, tried, however considerably, to point it out to her, her rage was at once turned against me. Whenever there was conflict or rebellion, the chambermaid, or the cook, or the butler, or the nurse, or the gardener, or several servants together left the house amid disgusting altercations, uttering threats and imprecations. When others took their places, and, seeming at first to be better, failed, Constance, for some mysterious reason, went so far as to accuse me of a silent conspiracy with the servants. This unfortunate tendency to scent plots and conspiracies everywhere is a trait which characterizes many people who are inexperienced and constitutionally unsure of themselves.

Bitter experience has taught me that it may develop to the point of persecution-mania if the individual in question is incapable of seeing himself, and if he is so lacking in introspection and self-observation that he is accustomed to make his own self the measure of all things. Advice does not help; the kindest leadership does not help. On the contrary, anyone stricken with this blindness will necessarily regard as hostile even those whom he loves or thinks he loves, whenever they try to stop his downward path, or to open his eyes to the sad results of his actions. But I was never fit to be, in that sense, a teacher and guide. I have an impatient heart, though a patient disposition, if one will grant me this distinction and try to understand it. In the course of time, to be sure, my impatience turned largely into resignation. I came to see that people cannot really be reached, and that they cling as fiercely to their qualities as though they must perish without the pettiest and ugliest of them. But there were years during which I often lost control of myself. I sometimes became unjust myself, especially when my sense of justice was wounded. This confession is not as paradoxical as it sounds. The passion for justice presupposes so precarious an equilibrium of the soul that the slightest disturbance of this equilibrium ravages and disorders the inner man, and he feels as though his universe were disintegrating. We seem to be overvaluing our powers and our rights in the very act of passionately embracing an ideal, so that even the good within us contains an evil.

"There is only one sufficient motive for the recording of these memories. I would revive the past in order to lay bare the errors which led to the destruction of my marriage and the darkening of my best years. If one would undertake such a task in genuine honesty, he must dig deep into the intricate roots of existence, and if he test himself thoroughly, he will discover that the decisive mistake was made at the very point where instinct once raised its warning but unheeded voice. There is no life in which, even for a moment, God is not

present and speaking; if we understand neither His presence nor His admonition there is no further grace in our purposes, and we have lost the right to bewail our fate. Every choice must be accomplished with the consciousness of a sacred responsibility. And the meaning of this responsibility is an answer to that infinite, all-penetrating being at the moment when it puts a question to our souls. It is unnecessary to be more definite; watchmen stand on guard lest the slightest indication should pass them. . . .

"If I now mention my children, it is to say that I only now recognize how difficult it is to disentangle and elucidate all these things. In all questions of upbringing and education, Constance's opinions and my own were diametrically opposed. This fact was clear even during the infancy of the children. The lack of agreement increased with the years and broke out into open contention. To describe this process step by step would be to get lost among unimportant and trivial details, Matters subject to a great law, or rather to a great fatality, would degenerate into hair-splitting accusations. This searching for cause and guilt whenever a child was not quite well; this immediate desperate appeal to a physician; this dissatisfaction with any physician who could not at once diagnose and cure the trouble, and the summoning, behind his back, of a second physician, or even of a third; this utter faith in the power of official science, and the corresponding unfaith in either nature or fortune; this over-indulgence to which all mankind and all the world were an evil element, which attributed all development and all success to its own perfection; no provision must be made for these growing creatures which their mother had not first approved; and no teacher, no school, no influence from without could satisfy her exorbitant demands; finally, this conviction that beyond the circle of her immediate influence there was nothing but danger, disease, moral ruin, utter inadequacy, immitigable misfortune! And how curious and sad to see that this same mother, who

believed that she could guide the lives of her children like omniscience itself, would lend an ear to the whispered suggestions of the meanest persons, and subject her stubborn will to all who flattered her absurdest notions or confirmed her in her extraordinary idea of her own importance, and her confused and clouded notions of the rest of the world. If no one contradicted her she was capable of a child-like and charming appearance of sincerity. In repose there was something innocent and kindly in her nature, but the least disturbance aroused her evil thoughts. And since, in the course of the years, constant activity and business grew more and more to be her element, she gradually lost these redeeming traits, and everyone but herself was horrified as she plunged from error to error, from disappointment to disappointment. Her strength failed her; her authority failed her. If a child's will rebelled, conflict was followed by defeat. She obeyed imaginary higher laws, and lost all touch with those that guide reality. She stumbled when she thought she was soaring. When the inevitable fall came, she poured out reproach and abuse upon the husband, protector, and guardian, who had not been present at the right moment to check or support her. Then she would unravel the past to seek proofs of accusations that could not be proved, because the guilt did not lie where she sought it. She would tear the tissue of life to shreds, often in the few painful hours of a single night, in order to support these accusations, which no defence could mitigate. All she wanted was a defence that would justify her accusations. There is more corrosive misery in the world brought about by conciliating and explanatory talk than unhappiness due to breaking another's heart by eternal separation. But hearts are not so easily broken. That is a legend.

"Strange how people can get drunk on a lie which justifies in their own eyes their actions, their sins of commission and omission, and seems to give them a halo of nobility and

self-sacrifice. They can get drunk to the point of utterly abandoning reason, almost of abandoning consciousness. Irrevocably this lie becomes cancerous; ulcerous lie is heaped upon ulcerous lie. The soul ceases to exercise its divine functions! There are women, obviously, for whom the burden of motherhood is too heavy. As self-centred creatures they might come to no grief. Their feeble energies might suffice for that. They might not even be wholly useless as members of a not very exacting society. But once they bring forth children, they seem to themselves important beyond their fondest hopes. It seems to them a true miracle that while they themselves are still struggling after reality, and are uncertain of themselves and their relation to the world, they have actually brought forth life. At once kindly care becomes a raging passion, natural duty a solemn service; vigilance becomes terror, and in their hysteria their child becomes an angel. The umbilical cord is severed in only a physical sense; it is the fate of this new being to be inseparable from its mother, and of the mother to be inseparable from it, in every respect, at every moment, or at least to feign this condition in the eye of the world. All this is nothing but essential weakness puffing itself up into a Hercules, assuming rights, in the sick fancy of the woman who is so afflicted, which can be admitted only if one conceives of life as a hothouse, of marriage as a prison, of the family as a fenced-in poultry-yard, a matriarchate involving the complete subjection of the man. . . . Ah, this hen-woman, who covers her chicks with her wings to protect them from some vulture of the air or some pole-cat of the fields—how often have we met her in all ranks of society! How often have we heard her shrill clucking as she seats herself upon her fancied throne in order, with venturesome self-righteousness, to meddle with Providence. Her devotion is unlimited, save by the fence of the poultry-run; her philosophical vision, her feeling for art, her social consciousness, her idealism—all are magnificent within those limits! At the

fence stands her outpost and demands password and identification. She is the foundress of the clan, and the spirit of the clan is the only power she admits. Do not try to count as an active personality; do not appeal to your achievements! You will be asked to name your clan and its password and totem. It matters not of what blood you are, only what clan's blood you acknowledge. First be father, husband, son, son-in-law, uncle, brother-in-law, cousin, nephew. . . . After that they will permit you to be man, workman, human being . . .

"And that is the triumph of the hen.

"Ah, these good women; how well they mean! They assure you of that often enough. And why should we not believe them? At bottom they know very well what they owe their children. Even if they have paid for their birth with many pangs, they have an unending compensation through them, in that they have obtained innocent and unbreakable hostages by whose virtue the man and husband and father is forever imprisoned and wholly at their mercy. They seem not to know it; they know it very well. They seem not to misuse the circumstance; they do so without ceasing. Knock at that brazen gate and ask to have it opened. Unless you have arms of brass they will fall shattered from their sockets. Above all, like those knights in the Arabian tale who were turned into stone by reason of their pitying ears—do not look back. But we are beloved of them. Aye, that's the rub. Yes, they love us. Alas! this conception of love has been brought into human speech and into our human world like a piece of theatrical scenery that hides a blooming landscape. At best it is the boastful title of a gigantic and mysterious book which few have taken the trouble to decipher. Or would you make your happiness dependent upon the pleasures of the senses and measure it according to those delights? Then you will be like the wanderer in a frozen world who tries to protect himself from an arctic death by the flame of a match.

"I would have died that death—without that match even

—if I had not met May Ernevoldt. It would not be seemly to go into the details of the process of my salvation; nor is it fitting in this place. All that I need do is to thank her, and I do so every day and every hour. She has opened to me unknown countries of the soul. A turning-point had come to me—the end of all paths; I could only plunge into bottomless inanity. She was the soaring bird who showed me, surrounded by that fence on every side, the only way out—the way upward. She helped me to discover the fact that the ethical and religious person retains no memory of the evil that has been done him—no general and no individual memory. He is magnanimous; that is to say, he is free of the tribe and its spirit. He is bound to his kind by profounder, nobler and more silent laws. If I undertake to protect this being who has enlightened me from mere material need—I am not even fulfilling a duty. It seems as inevitable to me as that I should protect myself. The stubborn spirit of the clan will, of course, be beside itself with rage. Yet what I give is the fruit of my work alone, and therefore intimately mine. May that hand wither which is outstretched to prevent me!

“When, for the first time, with all the considerateness that was possible and appropriate, I spoke to Constance of the advisability of a dissolution of our marriage, she had a maniacal fit of despair. I shall never forget this hour, nor the sight of her. And that, I said to myself, after the most irrevocable and unhealing breach, with the utter hopelessness of bridging the gulf, and the long, slow death of all genuine marital affection! What unbelievable blindness must be and must always have been present here! As though a man set free could not grant much more than one who is chained; as though it were better to trample upon another’s quivering corpse rather than open the iron gate through which he can return at times, a friendly guest.

“The fatality is inherent in the institution. Its forms no longer correspond to anything that lives. And I do not

believe that these forms can be revived or propped up any more. But what is to come to pass when these forms are utterly destroyed, and even the wretched illusion of them is gone, and what will be the nature of that new force which will remould our existence—that I do not know. Nor shall I live to know it.”

28

Luise gave the manuscript back to Ernevoldt. He smiled in his good-natured, shamefaced way, and put it back in his pocket. The maid came and announced to her mistress that someone had rung up twice. Luise ordered tea to be served. Ernevoldt chatted about a new play, whose first night he had seen, and said he had got into touch with the author in connection with the film rights. He looked at Laudin as though the latter had a particular interest in this matter. Laudin did not seem to have heard him. When Luise began to speak he looked at her almost greedily. But an expression of disappointment came over his weary features when she turned to Ernevoldt and made a contemptuous remark about the playwright in question. She used certain technical expressions, which left anyone unaccustomed to them uncertain of her meaning. While Ernevoldt was making an evident effort to draw the depressed and silent lawyer into the conversation, Luise seemed to be careless of doing so. Her words, at all events, seemed disinterested.

May Ernevoldt entered the room. She put the book which she had been reading on the table, went over to Luise's chair with soundless tread and leaned tenderly against her friend. Smiling, Luise looked up and caressed her cheek. Laudin gazed inquiringly at the pale girl with the silvery silken hair and the figure like a swaying reed. May frowned, and involuntarily nestled closer against Luise.

Luise said that May looked tired, and that she ought to be sent home. Courteously Laudin offered her the use of his car. "And you, yourself?" Luise asked, and turned her face to him with a glance that seemed markedly strange and cool. He answered that he could easily get a taxi. Ernevoldt affably asked Laudin what type of car he considered the best. He had recently been offered a Daimler car, cheap; cars could be bought now anywhere at a small percentage of their value. Laudin's answers were polite but absent-minded.

He finished his tea and carefully, almost timidly, placed the cup back on the table. Then he got up, since May Ernevoldt had in the meantime got ready to go out. "I am very greatly obliged to you, dear lady," he said constrainedly, as though he found it difficult to speak.

Luise looked at him expectantly, and smiled with a touch of hidden scorn. May and Bernt Ernevoldt also gazed at him expectantly. Curiously enough, this seemed to embarrass the experienced man of the world. Hesitatingly, stopping at the end of every sentence, gazing on the carpet, he said that in this manuscript thoughts had been expressed which were, in many respects, identical with his own. It was not even necessary to take into consideration the exquisite reading of the manuscript. All praise of it was vain, and admiration was almost like impudence. No beautiful rendering of it would have been required to impress him. It was hard for him to express precisely what had stimulated and excited him so strongly. He was profoundly conscious of the fact that the manuscript dealt with a force that absolutely demanded a decision from society, and with all possible urgency. Like cowards, we had all hitherto slunk away from that decision. As for himself, he hoped, when his own ideas had attained some sort of lucidity, that he would be able to say something to the purpose.

Doubtless they all realized that these were weighty and far-reaching words on the lips of a man like Friedrich Laudin,

words that committed him irrevocably, and would even, in a certain sense, determine the lines of his future actions. Hence the deep silence that followed them. Luise Dercum was the first to break the silence. She gave her hand to Laudin, and turning her head at the same time in May's direction, she said: "You see, May, I was sure that we should find a friend in Doctor Laudin. Well, Doctor, we shall be waiting for you as the heathen waited for an apostle."

The pressure of her hand was friendly, and her glance bold and forceful. Perhaps these words were thoughtlessly uttered. Laudin had no such suspicion. He bowed without speaking. Ernevoldt smiled his good-natured, shamefaced smile. May looked thoughtful.

29

Doctor Heimeran was in the habit of playing bridge at his club on certain evenings each week. His partners were Doctor Kappusch, another associate in Laudin's office, Professor Weitbrecht, a noted dermatologist, and a wealthy merchant. It was on a Saturday, after the closing of the shops and factories. They had not been playing very long. But Heimeran made such uncommon and annoying mistakes that his exasperated partner reproached him.

Suddenly he threw down his cards in vexation, passed his hand over his bald crown, and said: "I can't help thinking of other things to-day, and I'm amazed, Kappusch, that you can sit here in cold blood as though nothing had happened. I can't get this business about Laudin out of my mind. I've thought about it and talked about it, and it becomes more and more incomprehensible."

The emotion behind this complaint showed how far the more observant minds were already bewildered. This was the

motive of it: A man like Laudin, who had been throughout his life a model of normality and impeccable correctitude, refuses a case to which he has formally committed himself, and turns away a client to whom he has pledged his word. And this client is a lady of good repute, a respected member of society.

"You gentlemen all know to whom I'm referring. Frau Altacher quite naturally has not hesitated to spread the news, and I can't say that the scandal is very pleasant. The firm will be sensibly damaged; we shall lose reputation by this idle, curious, malevolent gossip. Why need a man like Laudin behave in such a fashion? Was it necessary?"

Questioningly and challengingly Doctor Heimeran looked around. They were all of the opinion that a thing so unseemly, so contrary to all use and custom, should never have come to pass. Heimeran had warned Doctor Laudin most insistently. Unluckily, it had been too late. He had begged Laudin to tell him his motives. The answer had been that Laudin could no longer reconcile Frau Altacher's case with his conscience; he had had occasion to change his opinion, had been forced to do so, in fact, and had told the lady so.

"But, gentlemen, he should have thought of that first. A lawyer has no right to change his opinions within twenty-four hours. He is like a lighthouse on a stormy coast; he must stick to his post."

It transpired from Heimeran's narrative that Laudin's change of mind was connected with a whole series of sensational happenings. Consul Altacher had died two days later, as though he had only waited for Laudin's decision to flee from whatever miseries life still held for him. And scarcely had his grave been filled than his widow instituted a suit for the restitution of a considerable fortune, against the consul's friend, Ernevoldt, and the latter's sister. She claimed sixty thousand gold crowns, which, according to her, these two had succeeded in wheedling out of her late husband. As if

the scandal were not enough, what does Laudin do? He undertakes to defend these people. More than that: he brings suit against the widow for almost ten times the amount stated, namely, half a million gold crowns, which, he asserts, the dead man had promised the Ernevoldts.

"Promised, I say, gentlemen! There isn't even a legal testament. Laudin argues that undue influences were at work, and appeals to a letter which Altacher wrote to Fräulein Ernevoldt. I ask you whether that isn't legally untenable and humanly disreputable. The whole case is disreputable. How can a man like Laudin lend himself to it? What is happening? Rather, what has happened?"

But that was not all, by any means. Heimeran's distress was in some degree due to quite a different matter; a matter of a private and personal nature. Doctor Kappusch would confirm the fact (and he did confirm it) that Heimeran had, at the very first symptoms, called his colleague's attention to certain things which were calculated to amaze anyone with a knowledge of human nature.

"You take a man who for twenty years has been accustomed to hanging his coat on a certain hook. One day he stops. He carelessly throws the coat on a chair, across a table, over the door of a cupboard. Haven't we the right to infer, from that, specific changes in the state of his mind? Here we've got a physician among us. I ask him to judge. For twenty years this man has addressed his old office attendant as 'Herr Ruediger.' One day he calls him simply Ruediger, in the harshest tone. For the same twenty years this same man has never been late at the office or in court, never delayed a conference, never left a letter unanswered. Suddenly this exemplary order and accuracy come to an end. And what an end! The letters accumulate in heaps; at the last moment another representative of the firm has to hurry to the court; clients who have been promised interviews for weeks have to be turned away or put off; some of them he won't see at all. He'll read documents

for thirty minutes and then throw them aside. We have scarcely been told that he is at last in his office—and he's off again. And you've seen him. Almost unrecognizable. I tell my colleagues that it is as though a hen with inky feet had walked over a fairly-written page. You can't blame me for being badly worried. He and I have been colleagues for years. We won our spurs together, and what stains the escutcheon of the one does not leave the other's clean."

Doctor Heimeran took up the pack of cards and began to shuffle it with nervous gestures.

The wealthy merchant, a morose and ill-humoured old man, said: "It's come to my ears, though I won't say that I credit it—but it has undoubtedly been the subject of common talk—that behind Laudin's curious behaviour in the Altacher affair there is the hand of the actress Dercum."

Doctor Heimeran was angry. He declared this to be stupid gossip. In all his long practice Laudin had never even been touched by the wiles of any woman. There was no example of it, and there was no justification for assuming such a thing.

Doctor Kappusch remarked quietly that, as far as he knew, Doctor Laudin's acquaintance with Fräulein Dercum was due entirely to his friendship for Egyd Fraundorfer, and was connected with the suicide of the latter's son. That the Dercum woman had been mixed up with this was an open secret. Laudin's intervention in this matter, far from being open to criticism, was, on the contrary, yet another proof of his unselfishness and of his loyalty to his friends.

At the mention of the name of Fraundorfer, Professor Weitbrecht had looked up. "That was the young musician," he said, with a very serious look. "He came to see me. Two days before his death he was in my office. A charming fellow. Infinitely to be pitied."

Sadly he nodded to himself, as though he were speaking of an experience too common and too frequent to give one pause, but which in this special case had proved unforgettable. No

one paid particular attention to his words, with the exception of Doctor Heimeran, whose legal acumen was combined with the qualities and the ambitions of a detective. He pulled out a notebook, and on an empty page he scrawled the two names: Fraundorfer—Weitbrecht. Then he dealt.

30

That very day Pia had been forced to keep lunch waiting for Laudin. He had promised to come home. But at one-thirty the office had telephoned that he couldn't come; he would certainly be home to dinner. At a quarter to eight that evening the telephone rang again. It was he himself who spoke this time. For some weeks past his voice had had a harsher, drier tone. He begged Pia on no account to wait for him; by the time he could get off it would be too late.

Pia answered amiably, although with a tinge of regret in her voice. She was unwilling to express more than a kindly regret for fear of annoying her overworked husband.

This had been going on for four days. They had seen equally little of him on the preceding days. Relly occasionally remarked that she'd almost forgotten how her father looked. She told Marlene that she had a plan. Very early in the morning, holding the dwarf Uistiti on her arm, she intended to appear at his bedside—a living reminder of his family. He would surely be unable to resist such an admonition. But Marlene was busy with more important things, and took very little interest in Relly's jokes. Pia feigned not to have heard either the plaint or the plan. She did not even smile that accustomed smile, forgiving even while it reproved, which Relly loved to see upon her mother's lips.

When, towards midnight, she heard Laudin come in, she kept her light burning for some time, in spite of her unusual

fatigue. Perhaps she was a little exhausted, worn by her many duties, by all the demands made upon her, by the insistent, quarrelsome nagging of inanimate things. Perhaps she thought that he might still visit her and sit for a quarter of an hour at her bedside. She had every reason to hope that, for it had happened on many, many days in the course of many years. But it did not come to pass to-day, as it had not done yesterday, and the day before, and the day before. A few minutes after half-past twelve she put out the light and tried to sleep. But when sleep came at last it was no real sleep. For there is a kind of sleep that is like a room with open doors; the draughts blow in and there is no feeling of comfort.

31

A few days later a series of queer annoyances began to overtake Pia. An individual, who refused to give a name, began to telephone in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, and even during the night. It was a sharp, shrill voice—a woman's voice. She wanted to speak to Frau Laudin on a very urgent matter, which, according to her, intimately concerned Dr. Laudin. Pia knew, of course, that the majority of such intrusions, when looked into, were mere impertinences; that they came from people whom Laudin had refused, for some reason, to represent, and whose importunities at the office had been rebuffed. Out of sheer good nature, she had gone personally to the telephone the first time the stranger had rung her up. Each time she asked for the name of the speaker there followed a pause, which was then succeeded by a curious gabble, half confused, half insolent, a mixture of threats and complaints and obscure hints. Finally, Pia sent the chambermaid to answer the woman's telephone calls. If the girl refused to deliver the various messages that were

given her, the voice became stridently insulting. Occasionally the connection was suddenly cut off in the middle of a sentence; at other times there were only inarticulate noises. In the late hours of the evening there was no escape for Pia, except at the risk of missing important messages, or even a communication from Laudin himself. And so that voice came to her ear more and more frequently in the late hours of the evening—twice almost every evening. The first words were usually uttered in a disguised tone; then the unsympathetic shrillness of the voice revealed itself, and as soon as Pia recognized it she hung up the receiver. She was seized by an abhorrence of the whole device, so malevolently featureless and formless. She was tormented by a wire and a bell; there was no effectual resistance to be made; she was helpless under that treacherous violation; she was forced to surrender to the wire and the bell, senseless and annoying though its messages were. Gradually things reached a point where she was frightened at the very sound of the signal and even listened nervously in the stillness of the night for that shrill ringing.

One evening it seemed to her that she had suffered enough. With indignant impatience she called into the black mouth-piece: "You will either give me your name and state your business or I will appeal to the police." The word "police" seemed to have the desired effect at once. The voice assumed a fulsome amiability. Very well, then, said the unknown individual, she would tell her name. She had thought it useless until now; she had hoped that, by trying so many times, she would succeed in getting the doctor himself. She had to talk to him, privately and at length. Would Frau Laudin be so very kind as to tell him who had rung up. No further explanations would be necessary. She need merely say that it was Frau Hartmann. He would know all about it, then. She would be glad to come out to his house; there was no trouble she would not take; she only begged for an appointment. The letter which the doctor had sent her had excited her frightfully; for

a whole day she had had to stay in bed without stirring a limb; such letters were worse than poison for her; she would post the letter to Frau Laudin, so that the lady could see for herself how unjustly she, Brigitte Hartmann, was being treated. It was an outrage that cried to high heaven—and to think that it came from a man like Doctor Laudin, on whose honour she would have staked her life. Frau Laudin could answer her when she had read the letter, or telephone her at 56-2-13; a great deal might depend on Frau Laudin's keeping in touch with her; she would be very glad, too, to call on Frau Laudin and talk to her alone; certain conditions would have to be observed, of course; she ventured to say that it was not to Doctor Laudin's advantage to refuse so stubbornly to receive her and listen to her; no, on the contrary, and Frau Laudin would live to see it. Things had come to her ears which might be of decisive importance to Frau Laudin herself. She herself felt much easier now that she had been able to pour out her overcharged heart to Frau Laudin. She had a great admiration for Frau Laudin. She had seen her last Sunday in town. Her cousin had pointed the lady out to her. And so she took the liberty of saying good night.

All this bubbled out of the receiver into Pia's ear like water from a spring; she endured it dumbly. It did not distress her; it did not concern her. These were Laudin's affairs; that domain was foreign to her; the people with whom Laudin had dealings were vague silhouettes. The names of these people bore no more significance for her than the random names of a directory. Their fortunes meant no more to her than the rattling of plates in the kitchen. Yet something repulsive seemed to have been squirted at her; involuntarily Pia looked at her hands, as though they had been soiled.

On the following afternoon she received the letter which Laudin's firm had sent to Frau Brigitte Hartmann. "If by the fifteenth of January you have not made a satisfactory

arrangement in the matter of our client, Fräulein Caroline Lanz, we shall be forced to institute criminal proceedings against you. We shall proceed at once to submit an affidavit to the court of chancery, and cause you to be summoned and examined on oath by the aforesaid court. In the meantime we shall, in the name of our client, institute an inquiry at the bank in which the moneys of your late husband were deposited, to ascertain whether, since his departure and subsequent death, any funds have been withdrawn by you. In any case we shall immediately have the account declared formally closed, which can be done at any time by producing evidence of decease. Awaiting an early reply, we are, etc."

Brigitte Hartmann's commentary to Pia was as follows:

"You now see, dear Frau Laudin, how I am being treated. I am determined that no one shall use such a tone to me. I ask you, am I an adventurer? No, I am a mother, just as you are, Frau Laudin, and both as a mother and as a wife I have nothing with which to reproach myself, unless, indeed, that I always took my duties too seriously. I know of some who disgrace the holiest feelings of man. And they are people, too, of whom you would expect it least. But facts are facts, dear Frau Laudin. Ten times I went to the office; the doctor had no time for me, simply no time. I have no words for this insult, especially in view of my boundless esteem for him. But then I hear that a great many of his clients complain of being neglected. Well, they don't know what I know, and what I will take very good care, dear Frau Laudin, not to divulge. But maybe later on I won't be so considerate. I've never been one to hide my light under a bushel, and I see what I see, and I've got eyes in my head, if only because we ought to look about us in this world, and see whether the high and mighty people are so wonderfully moral as they would like us to believe. I wasn't born in a workhouse—not I. I come of a good family, and had a good education, facts which nobody seems to consider. Hoping that you will not make things

worse by neglecting the voice of public opinion, I am, yours very faithfully, Brigitte Hartmann."

Of all this Pia, of course, understood nothing. But as on the day before she had the sensation of having been physically soiled. Next morning at breakfast she asked Laudin: "Who is Brigitte Hartmann?" and handed him the letter, and related to him briefly the strange annoyances to which she had been subjected for over a week.

Laudin read the letter, held it in his hand longer than seemed necessary, and said at last with an angry tensivity which surprised Pia: "We must discover some way of rendering this idiot harmless. It is quite possible that she may go so far in her impudence as to molest you in person. Avoid her if possible, avoid the very sight of her, avoid her as you would a pestilence. But I'll find a way first of silencing the woman."

Pia looked at him with a smile and a gentle shake of the head. "I should certainly not have told you anything, or shown you the letter either, if I had dreamed that it would excite you or give you a single uncomfortable moment," she said. "I know nothing about the woman. But she's probably some poor unfortunate wretch, and you ought to be used to that sort of woman. She seems to have got herself into a false situation, and so she wriggles and whines for you. That should not trouble you. Or does it? There is something in this that is worrying you. Would you like to tell me what it is?"

Breakfast had been a little late that morning; the children had started off to school; the husband and wife sat alone at table. And while Pia was asking him this, and looking into his broad, serious face, that carefree expression of her own features, which she had cultivated so sedulously throughout the mornings of the many years, underwent a change. Suddenly there lay upon that beautiful forehead a dim reflection of all that had furrowed his brows and whitened his hair, although she neither knew nor questioned what it was. It seemed to arise like an act of inner obedience. It is through such acts

that the faces of married people come finally to bear a mutual resemblance. For some seconds their eyes met, and after an unduly protracted silence Laudin began to speak.

It was an wholly erroneous assumption that the person in question was deserving of any compassion. Sympathy was quite out of place here. The woman was flourishing and well able to take care of herself, and was the representative of an entire class. All that she did, desired, demanded, her very life and breath, was the final result of regulations and conventions having no substantial nature of their own; of all those iron rules which had gathered rust in the course of the centuries, of all the agreements, bulls, enactments, prescriptions and charters which, from the very invention of the State onwards, had been decreed and petrified in order to change right into compulsion, security into terror and good custom into the spirit of the eternal penitentiary. It might be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that through the slow and industrious undermining and corroding of this representative and her predecessors, all noble spontaneity had been destroyed, and was being still further destroyed. To her and her like the whole of humanity, men, women and children, were but a single debtor. She conceived of herself as having a perpetual lien on law, morality, love, fidelity, good faith; on God Himself. And in so far as she conceived of herself as having been disappointed in her claims upon happiness and satisfaction—in precisely that measure she believed all human society to be in her debt. She carried about a bond concealed in her bosom, ready to show it at every opportunity. Ceaselessly outraged in her fancied and inalienable rights, she was the Shylock of society—Shylock demanding his pound of flesh.

It was doubtful whether Pia understood all this. Such philosophical criticisms of society, having only a symbolical content, went beyond the reach of her vision. Yet her eyes rested with extreme attention on her husband's face, and what had struck her was evidently less the substance of his words

than the embittered, weary, secretly excited tone in which he spoke. And it seemed to her, too, as though the words were not spoken so much to her as to an imaginary audience. This impression was deepened by his bearing and his gestures. He sat there with lowered eyes, his chin resting upon his hand—a strangely remote and unfamiliar figure.

Nor had he finished. . . . One could see every day with what embittered obstinacy this female Shylock insists upon the privileges denominated in that imaginary bond. He advised Pia, for instance, to take the trouble to study the characteristic document that had been sent her. This, or others coming from similar sources. She would find the substance and intention extraordinarily identical. She would find the same flags fluttering and the same trumpets blowing, the same aiming at the same targets, and the same crazy implacability. The appeal would always be to duty, honour, conscience, motherhood, sacrifice, faith, religion, heart and home. Never to pride, to dignity of mind, to nobility of heart. She is insensible to reasons—this Shylock in petticoats! she does not hear them; she does not hear other human voices nor see other human faces; she flourishes her bond, and wants the pound of flesh denominated in the bond. She is deaf to all else. She keeps the police busy and wastes the time of the courts. If she herself comes into conflict with the police and the courts, she pours forth a whole torrent of pettifogging complaints, and with wild lamentations calls upon the whole community to witness to her complete innocence, and finally succeeds in crowning her crimes with the halo of martyrdom. Laudin said that it amused him grimly, that it delighted him with a profound sense of irony to imagine this creature's performances over the telephone. It was so amusing—this vision of Frau Shylock at the telephone: she uses all modern improvements and inventions in order to make them subservient to her ruling passion, the supreme aim of which is to pester people and make them the tributaries of her misfortune. Frau Shylock

wants to see all the world about her in turmoil; she carries in her bosom a pained, contorted image of herself, and she desires all men to share that vision with her and to mourn over her. And Frau Shylock is especially fond of such impersonal projections of the self as the telephone; she adores the telegraph, the air mail, the radio, for these make possible an incomparably heightened activity on her part, compared with the dilatory methods amidst which she grew up. They make possible a swiftness of manifestation, of conveying news, of setting people at odds, which surpasses anything that she had ever conceived of in her formerly humble dreams. Humble! For though she may have risen in the world, and may finally be found in the highest ranks of society, she remains a plebeian by the very constitution of her soul. For what is it to be a plebeian, except to emphasize the letter and the bond, the convention and the rubber stamp—with an eye fixed upon some pound of living flesh?

Pia had lowered her head, like someone overtaken by a hailstorm. Her cheeks had grown pale, and her eyes large and round. It was as though she were thinking: what kind of a man is this who is saying these words? Do I know him? Do I still know him? Or have I lost all knowledge of him? As though seeking to clear their path of what she had heard and to introduce a healing commonplace, she said softly: "The tailor says he wants you to go and be fitted, Friedrich. I'm so glad you're getting some clothes. I think it must be two years since you had anything new. It's a shame. Even when I was scolding Egyd Fraundorfer the other day for his dreadful shabbiness he told me that at his age no man would go to the tailor unless he were absolutely forced to do so. Whenever he did go it meant an attempt at either flight or fraud. Characteristic Fraundorfer nonsense."

Laudin looked up. "Yes, it is nonsense," he said. "And yet, and yet, there may be just a grain of truth in it. But we won't go into that, Pia."

He got up and kissed her forehead. Yielding to an impulse which was not clear to her, but which made her feel as though she must somehow protect him to-day, she asked him whether he would like her to go into town with him. He shook his head.

32

For months Laudin had been representing a great joint-stock company in a suit against the State. It was a complicated and protracted affair, and very large sums were involved. Every step had to be taken with extreme caution, for the slightest mistake might have had the most disastrous consequences.

When the case came up for hearing for the fourth time, Laudin was half an hour late. This was noted with some astonishment. The counsel for the defence had adroitly profited by this delay to persuade the judge to omit the reading of a deposition which would have been of the utmost importance in determining the decision of the court. It would be difficult to make up for this omission. The incident gave rise to a debate between Laudin and the judge. Laudin emphasized the imperfect instructions with which his representative had come to court. In the course of this debate, quite contrary to his custom, he became unnecessarily violent. The opposing counsel remonstrated; Laudin replied with an impatience and a contemptuous scorn which were commented upon unfavourably, especially in view of the fact that his almost ceremonious courtesy had for years been proverbial.

The judge, who was a genial and experienced person, succeeded in appeasing him, and the court continued its business. However, it seemed to the onlookers, composed almost entirely of experts, as though Laudin, in his management of the case, lacked all his usual clarity of judgment. He over-

emphasized the trivial, and at the same time overlooked decisive arguments. Once or twice he had even to apologize for crass failures of memory. It was as though he found it impossible to master his material, and conscious of the weakness of his conduct of the case, was trying to obtain certain results by violent measures, although he knew that they could be achieved only by the most supple and carefully calculated diplomacy.

The representatives of his client, frightened by the possibility of an unfavourable outcome, asked for an adjournment. The judge, who had occasionally cast a thoughtful and questioning glance upon Laudin, consented to this request.

33

That very day three new clients appeared in the office, all seeking divorce. In all three cases the differences were utterly hopeless. These marriages were rotten to the core, and an examination of the facts left no doubt but that in all three cases the men were the guilty parties. In one case the morbid avarice of a notoriously wealthy man had driven his wife to despair. The second case concerned a man with completely shattered nerves. He was a banker, and his raging ambition for power and position and influence had driven him to work, year in and year out, for sixteen to eighteen hours a day. His health was entirely ruined, and during his increasingly frequent fits of profound depression the only thing that gave him any satisfaction was to beat his wife. At the same time his wife, whose spirit was wholly broken, emphasized his former kindliness.

In the third case both husband and wife appeared. The man was an engineer, and seemed at first sight a calm and sensible fellow. But when the conversation turned upon

his matrimonial troubles, he betrayed a shameless cynicism as regards both the details and the general atmosphere of his marriage which was the more monstrous in its effect because his description was constantly and almost appreciatively confirmed by his wife. He not only admitted, quite frankly, that he had deceived and betrayed his wife, that he had seduced his young sister-in-law, carried on affairs with two of the latter's friends, got a servant-girl with child, and spent his nights in bars and dance-halls, but he was proud of his misdeeds, and was full of magniloquent justifications. He talked about the very proper desire for self-expression, of the necessity of sensual delight in the life of a hard-worked man, of the folly and harmfulness of the monogamic ideal in general.

They were both people who no longer took the trouble to curtain the windows of their souls. They had lost the capacity of surprising one another, to say nothing of tolerating one another. They had abolished regret and secured themselves against it. In this their fate was typical of the age, and unimportant. They lived together like Bushmen; but, like well-taught and progressive pupils of their age, they did not neglect to analyse their relations, and to strip one another to the buff. And they said in effect: We didn't harmonize with one another. Harmony—that most ill-used word. As though their feelings and thoughts had ever known an inkling of such a thing. As a geologist can estimate the effects of an earthquake, so could Laudin gauge the conditions of minds in the midst of this social collapse, of which neither the beginning nor the end nor the true nature was as yet recognizable. For him life was becoming a journey amidst ruins.

"Have you any children?" he asked.

Yes, they had two children. One had come with them, the wife declared with cheerful zeal; she was in the waiting-room; she would bring her in to show the doctor. The child was a girl of four, and lovely beyond description.

The emotion which Laudin experienced at the sight of the child's beauty made him feel sick at heart. When, a little while later, Bernt Ernevoldt and May, who had been announced, entered the room, he said suddenly, in the midst of their conversation, as though this had been in his mind all the time: "I really believe that children are of different blood, of a different chemical constitution from adults. They are as different from us as we from the fauna of the ocean floor. And suddenly they become ordinary human beings. And we know what that means. Up to their fifth or seventh year they are elf-like creatures; incomprehensibly above us, pure, tender and good; miraculous in their possibilities. Suddenly they become mere people, quite ordinary people; hopelessly average, empty, stupid, inarticulate; utterly God-forsaken. How does that come about? And why? At what point does the break occur? By what dark magic is the crystal transformed into ordinary window-glass? At what moment? On what day does it begin? And for what reason? One could think oneself crazy over this problem."

May, who was in deep mourning, and, as usual, had very little to say, raised her veil, and her moonstone-grey eyes gleamed mysteriously. "In the souls of children those things die that their mothers and fathers are unable to live," she said softly.

Laudin looked at her searchingly, as though he were waiting for a more definite explanation. But she relapsed into silence.

Ernevoldt and his sister had come in order to sign a power of attorney. Moreover, May had had an interview on the previous evening with Constance Altacher, at the latter's express request. She was expected to give a report of the interview, but it

soon appeared that she was not capable of doing so. She had given such a report, immediately after the interview, to Luise Dercum; she could not bring herself to do so a second time. Luise had declared herself quite ready to tell Laudin all about it. To judge from Bernt Ernevoldt's allusions the scene must have been a painful one. There had been tears, and reminiscences, and imprecations, and adjurations, and an offer of reconciliation, and a demand for renunciation—all in one and the same breath—with the result that May had come home quite ill.

Laudin would have liked to get at the concrete facts. The character of Constance Altacher had begun gradually to inspire him with an interest which was somewhat obscure, and not wholly comprehensible even to himself. He was no less interested, in a different way, in a woman of a different social stratum: in Brigitte Hartmann. It seemed to him as though the endless procession of women who in the course of years and decades had passed like shades before his eyes had gradually attained a symbolic embodiment in these two figures. It seemed to him that these two incarnations were the symbols of a crisis in human society, and that it was through them that he first realized the inescapable fact that in his implication with such fates and fortunes an unfathomable evil had been done to himself.

From Ernevoldt, as well as from actual witnesses, principally a lawyer of his acquaintance, he had been informed of what had taken place in the sanatorium a day or two before the death of Consul Altacher. In the presence of two brothers-in-law and an older brother of her husband, Constance had appeared at his bedside, had embraced him with tears, and almost smothered him with caresses, and had given every sign of hysterical exaltation. On her knees, and with lifted hands, she had besought him to abandon his intention to obtain a divorce, for she would never, never consent to it. His kinsmen had previously agreed to have a quiet talk with

Altacher. They were disagreeably surprised when Constance suddenly burst into the room, the more so as she had given her solemn promise not to endanger their intervention on her behalf by an unexpected personal appearance. But somebody must have told her that Altacher had summoned the lawyer. And she dreaded nothing so much as the making of a will. She fancied that she was the only person who could prevent it; that was why she had come. But she had not come alone. In the corridor waited her three daughters, whom she had forced to accompany her. They had gone daily to see their father, but without their mother, for they knew how unfavourable her presence was to his state of health. It was much against his will that Altacher had finally consented to receive the delegation of his relatives. The physicians, moreover, had duly called his attention to the possible consequences of any unusual excitement. Their objection, however, was more apparent than real, since they had practically given him up, and on the other hand they may have thought that the opportunity of putting his affairs in order might even have a favourable influence. This was the reason why Constance found it possible to gain admission. She thought it was her duty to disobey his insistent demand that she should not visit him for a time. A man dare not close his door to his wife, she said to his daughters, when they ventured gently to remonstrate. Whenever she determined on a definite course her will was utterly inflexible, and since she nursed the delusion of a plenary inspiration from on high, inhibitions of any kind did not exist for her. The sick man attempted in vain by gestures and whispered words to calm her vehemence, her noisy grief, her stormy appeals; equally in vain were the persuasions of his kinsmen, who felt that under the circumstances their mission was futile. The calculated violence of Constance's outbursts increased up to the moment of the lawyer's arrival. Dramatically she summoned her children, and cried out, in a very convulsion of despair: It now depends

on you whether your father plunges you into eternal shame and makes over to his mistress that fortune which belongs to you alone, and to no one else in the world! The girls burst into tears; they were thoroughly ashamed; they would have liked nothing better than to flee. But the iron will of their mother robbed them of all thought and determination. She had always possessed this peculiar power; it was always hers when she had worked herself up into a passion; and Altacher himself had succumbed to it. A human being capable of being inflamed at will by the highest degree of passionate excitement can pull down heaven and earth, and pry open the jaws of hell. Altacher, according to his own sad confession, had never been able to control this possessed creature; and so she had lost all sense of values; she took darkness for light. Once more he resigned himself; at his silent gesture the lawyer withdrew; with no hope but to insure the peace of his last hours, he promised Constance to refrain from making the legacy which, according to her conviction, would for ever have tarnished the honour of the family. It was clear that in his state of health any discussion of a divorce would have been futile. In return, Constance, who seemed utterly melted and overwhelmed by emotion and gratitude, vowed that so far as she could prevent it his friend should never know a care in life. She also contritely apologized, before those present, including her own children, for the insulting manner in which she had spoken of May. Two nights later Edmond Altacher died. Constance, a faithful wife and nurse, sat at his bedside. May had not been admitted to see him again.

Laudin said that the whole story gave him a feeling of dizziness. Good and evil, grief and calculation, love and business instinct, piety and greed, were here so inextricably intertwined that each seemed now to intensify, and now to annul the other, so that the faculty of judgment could find no purchase, and the moral consciousness no starting-point

from which to operate. In the whole of his practice he had not come upon a similar case. His sense of justice and equity was profoundly wounded by these transactions. When he thought of them he was overcome by a ravenous hunger for cleanliness and human dignity; waking in the middle of the night, he told May, he was filled with a burning and impotent rage. No one about him was able to estimate how far his actions were inspired by quiet, independent resolution and objective responsibility. The immediate motives lay on the surface. But what happened in the depths, what employed his whole inner nature, what slowly spun its undeterminable web in his bosom—this remained hidden from him. He was not accustomed to analysing himself. He was one of those modest natures who take but little interest in their own inner life, and who allow the unknown forces of their own souls to operate freely out of a sort of self-respect. This much was certain, that he felt the death of Altacher as though it had been that of a dear friend. It was chiefly under the immediate impression of this event that he took the fatal step of acting as the legal representative of the Ernevoldts. When, thereupon, Constance Altacher entrusted her case to one of the most skilful, astute, and in a certain sense notorious lawyers—namely, Doctor David Kerkowetz—it became to Laudin a point of honour and conscience to throw over this doubtful case the mantle of his authority.

He seemed to forget that by so doing he was imperilling that authority, and perhaps even the honour of his name.

Constance, in the course of her interview with May Ernevoldt, in order to fulfil, at least formally, the promise that she had made her dying husband, had apparently made the girl a

definite proposition concerning a pecuniary settlement. But as we have seen, May was not to be persuaded to give an account of this interview—whether out of a feeling of contempt, or because she felt that a humiliation had been inflicted upon her, it was impossible to say. When Laudin insisted that, in order that he might with propriety intervene, he must be informed of all details, she begged him again and again to go to Luise, who had her authority to give the necessary information.

"I have a great deal more to tell you," she said to Laudin, in the confidential manner which she reserved for a very few friends, "and I have long made up my mind to do so. Edmond's marriage, and his experiences in that marriage—I can't get rid of the impression of it all. It has become to me the symbol of all the guilt and suffering of man: the tragedy of human passion. If only I had the power to tell you! So much is implicated in that—all the pain and darkness of the world. What he succeeded in writing down can give you only the faintest notion. The knowledge I gained from him, although we never talked about it directly, has completely changed my opinions of marriage. Only, now that he is gone, it happens now and then"—at this point her voice sank to an almost indistinguishable whisper, and her eyes seemed to disappear—"that I summon him in order to question him and take counsel with him. For to me he is not dead."

Laudin had heard from Luise Dercum that May had become completely absorbed by the idea of and the belief in a living spiritual relationship with her dead friend. To hear it confirmed from her own lips, however, surprised him, and even gave him, for a moment, a perceptible and unpleasant feeling of shame. He had always to suppress this feeling whenever he saw that people were really trying to transcend the natural order of things, really existed in a super-world of dreams, and that this did not rest merely on hearsay, and could not be dismissed with a mere shake of the head.

It had been reported to him that since the death of her husband Constance Altacher was observing something like a cult in commemoration of him. She was collecting reminiscences of him, looking up all his letters and having them copied, repeating his opinions and sayings as though they were oracles, and displaying photographs of him in all the rooms of the house, precisely as though his person had always been the object of her veneration, and she had never done otherwise than make his character and his opinions the lode-stars of her life. Was not this resuscitation, this attempt to recall him who was gone, yet another insolent attack upon moral and natural law? This attack did not, indeed, estrange the man from his world, but it distorted the facts and traduced a life that had passed away. But even while he asked himself the question, Laudin could not help wondering whether it was for him to call that a lie which most people would consider a praiseworthy piety. Nor was it to be denied that this pious tissue held a special truth of its own, however much he was determined to despise it, together with its possible content of truth, since this sort of piety meant nothing to him but an impudent suppression of bygone sins. It was conceit, once more the same unbelievable conceit—disguised, masked, scarcely to be identified, and yet as odious in this form as in any other.

This phenomenon—so he called it—had become his nightmare; the social spectre that filled him with shuddering misery, and against which he was determined to take the field.

To May he spoke with great kindness, in order to conceal from her the thoughts that left their almost convulsive traces upon his features. He wanted to understand. But like a plant that opens its blossoms only in the dusk, and whose manifestations of life are confined to the vague groping of its tissues, she was unaffected by his reactions, and seemed to have no suspicion of the keenness with which he had noted her declaration of the "appearance" of her dead friend, and his anxiety to

discover the attitude of Luise Dercum toward this encroachment upon the irrational. The saddest kind of obscurantism—such was his judgment, in his character of one who had always trodden the path of enlightenment. And in his resistance there was a good deal of the unimaginative hostility of the academically trained intellectual liberal. From his standpoint, then, the friendship between Luise and May seemed mysterious. He told himself, to be sure, that he was committing the common masculine error of believing that a friendship between women was based upon like-mindedness and intellectual harmony. Yet in this instance the differences of the two characters were so striking that even without intellectual harmony a cordial relationship seemed hardly credible. On the one hand there was a shy, timid, isolated, bloodless sensitive plant; on the other hand a woman all mobility, fire, actuality, speculation. No theory of the attraction of opposites seemed sufficient to explain this case.

This contrast, which he made with characteristic thoroughness, bore witness to the light in which, at this period, Luise Dercum still appeared to him. In his own thoughts of her he doubtless granted her rights which he would have denied to any other human being, certainly to any other woman. Perhaps it was, above all, her independence that impressed him. In his experience really independent characters were the rarest things in the world. Whenever he met such persons, he would forgive a certain arrogance and hard pride, from which, even as in Luise's case, they were seldom free. Luise's specifically feminine genius, the miracle of her ability to intensify and transform herself—these qualities did not make the path to her easier. It seemed to bid Laudin to adopt an attitude of reverent aloofness, an ever-silent worship. To subordinate himself to the mission of her genius, to allow no criticism of his, no idle comparison or blame or wounded feeling to tarnish it—this seemed to him to be his duty. A few days after his last conversation with Fraundorfer he wrote to his friend for

the purpose of refuting in one defiantly concentrated argument the ugly suspicions of the actress which Fraundorfer had expressed:

"At last a woman, at last, for once, a woman; a free and freely-soaring heart, and therefore a sincere one, somehow and in a deeper sense guiltless, if it is proper to see guiltlessness in the power of a human being to rise instinctively from her root. In her, at least, there is nothing of the distorted, warped, stickily secretive character of those bourgeois slaves of sex who are condemned to legal cohabitation and exist by virtue of it."

Yet were not these the words of a bourgeois who seeks a way out from his own tract of life, and either does not or will not observe the nature of his own subterfuges?

36

It had become really necessary to confer with Luise. Not only on May's account, but for many other reasons. But she was hard to get hold of, and a confirmed enemy of definite appointments. Her situation was as follows: She had not only quarrelled with her present manager, but she was being sued for breach of contract by her former producers in Berlin. Moreover, she had now made up her mind to secure Laudin's professional services in the matter of getting a divorce. But since the interview when, after some hesitation, he had promised her his assistance, he had not succeeded in getting out of her the minimum of necessary material and data. From day to day she either forgot or made impatient excuses, pleading important appointments, or her artistic plans and duties, or misunderstandings at the theatre, or controversies with newspapers and editors and authors. She was not getting on quickly enough; her ambition was not satisfied; what she

achieved did not fulfil her expectations; the unfed flame smouldered; everywhere she saw obstacles, conspiracies, envy, faithlessness, distrust. "It is unendurable!" she cried, and ran across the room like an imprisoned creature, her hands behind her, her shoulders thrown back, "wading in mud and grasping at the wind; all the fools and sluggards are in a conspiracy against anyone who both wills and accomplishes. I have no time; I have absolutely no time; I can't sit around in your musty corners and make grimaces for your entertainment; I should smash your windows. I will, by God, I will!"

And the very moment after one of these bitter outbursts she was capable of shaking with laughter, her hands clasped and her body bent far forward.

One of her plans was to buy a theatre of her own. But for the present she had no money. "Get me the money, dearest Doctor," she cried to Laudin, and looked at him in irritation, as though she were amazed that he hadn't already started on his way to get it. "All these important folk whose chestnuts you pull out of the fire are simply snoring on their money-bags. Can't you at least make that money come alive? The creatures themselves can go on sleeping. What I want is living money!"

"We haven't got our Cræsus to the point of bringing it to order," Laudin replied. Her magnificent demands embarrassed him. Other people were present, the featureless loiterers and semi-acquaintances who drifted into the actress's house, and without whom she was rarely to be seen. It annoyed him when Luise made her appeals to him in their presence.

Another plan, which was already fairly definite, and seemed nearer to realization, was the founding of an international film company with Luise Dercum as its leading star. Bernt Ernevoldt was to be at the head of the undertaking; according to Luise he was the man for the post. He had both the experi-

ence and the knack. So she asserted. (She often made an assertion with all possible emphasis and at the same time allowed it to be seen that she didn't believe a word that she was saying.) The intention of the company was to attract foreign capitalists, and the interest of several who were willing to invest considerable sums in the concern had already been gained. So, at least, Ernevoldt asserted. And he really believed what he said.

Thus, in addition to the Altacher affair, the suit brought against her by the Berlin manager, and the question of her own divorce, this business transaction now helped to maintain a living relationship between Laudin and Luise Dercum, and necessitated a continual stream of messages and communications between them. Almost daily Ernevoldt appeared in the office with a portfolio full of documents, so that Doctor Heimeran once acridly observed to his colleagues that if things continued in this fashion they would have to establish a separate office for the affairs of Fräulein Dercum. Unless, indeed, the entire practice of the firm was gradually to be confined to the affairs of the aforesaid Fräulein Dercum. Everything seemed to be heading in that direction.

It was a fact that Ernevoldt, awkward and heavy as he was, put Laudin's patience and indulgence to the severest test. It depressed him that the breathlessly mercurial woman should employ this habitual sluggard as her pacemaker. It was always a long time before Ernevoldt understood the terms of a contract, and until he had formulated his objections to this or that proposal; then he had certain misgivings; then he had to ring up Luise on the telephone. Next he broached the project of a tour, and Laudin had to prove to him that it was an unsound scheme. He seemed to yield to argument; but fifteen minutes later he would begin to discuss the matter as if it had never been mentioned before. All the while he looked comfortable and benevolent, smiled good-naturedly and shamefacedly, and seemed delighted with the

consciousness of his own good looks and well-being. He never lost faith, and never doubted the success of even his most fantastic plans. At the end of every failure he discovered, without any effort of thought, a new and more radiant vista, down which he trotted with the composure of a Newfoundland dog.

Laudin could not help communicating to Luise his doubts of Ernevoldt's reliability. Luise laughed. "Don't you worry about him," she said. "He's the kind that wins because he doesn't know how to play, and out of sheer absent-mindedness forgets his old umbrella and takes home a brand-new one instead. I like these plucky, sanguine fellows. A man ought to succeed in what he undertakes."

This brief conversation, which was an introduction to a much more significant one, took place one night after the performance. Laudin had been to the theatre. Whenever Luise played a new part she sent him a ticket. But he would often drop in to see her in the same part a second or a third time, if only for an hour, in order to renew his impression of some particular act or scene. His visits to the theatre were secret visits; they grew more secret as they increased in frequency; one might have said that he concealed them from himself. They gave him emotions which he had not hitherto known. These emotions seemed to him welcome and unexpected liberations from the pressure of life; as he became more accustomed to them, so their effect grew to be like that of a powerful narcotic, the danger of which lies in the undue relaxation of soul and body between the doses. He was not deceived in this matter, since self-control had become a habit with him. Certain rapid, abbreviated notes which he had been accustomed to make for some time past, usually late at night, were like superficial monologues, in which he strove to find his bearings, to issue warnings to himself, to ask himself in amazement whither he was steering, and at the same time to confirm himself in his behaviour with a strange and increasing

obstinacy. In these notes he never mentioned the possibility of a personal and private relationship to Luise Dercum. He would probably have been both alarmed and indignant if some superior spirit, who had an insight into the meaning and kernel of all things, had whispered to him that this very omission was the surest sign of the fact that he was sailing under a false flag in treacherous waters. It must not be forgotten that the majority of men who have been hardened and sobered by the practical life have an almost superstitious conception of the region in which a Luise Dercum moves, and never dream that her disillusion may be even greater and more unhappy than their own. Outwardly distrustful, but inwardly full of longing, curious to the point of lustfulness, they see in that supposedly higher world a marriage of freedom and beauty, of faery glamour and noble passion, of liberation and bliss. In some such fashion Laudin gave the actress his idolatrous admiration. At this period, when he was still keeping the real truth from himself, she became for him the conqueror of our disconsolate working day, the genius who had the power of making tormented humanity forget its wretchedness evening after evening. The conclusion to which he had come was more or less to the effect that he had denied himself these noble relaxations from the protracted slavery of life on principle; that he had been too cowardly, too confused, too downtrodden, to enjoy them; his education had petrified him, and the constant expenditure of strength without equivalent inspiration had disillusioned him. Thus the overburdening of his motor system had revenged itself by the empty, meaningless functioning of his sensory system; and so a hunger had arisen, in which, to be sure, harmful germs might be slumbering. It may be dangerous to long so for the unknown, distant shore. But was he not infinitely weary of and disgusted with the earth beneath his feet? Had he not himself defended the adventure of flight and transformation in words compacted of blood and pain? Unless he wanted to lower himself

in his own eyes as a mere maker of empty phrases, had he, of all people, the right to be intimidated by the consequences that may attend a step into the dark? No loss was to be feared, least of all that of personality?

Here the question arises whether one who is determined, under given circumstances, to hazard his very personality, should not be ready to sacrifice a part of his fortune as a trifling payment in advance?

On this very evening Laudin was to be put to the test.

37

She had been playing the title-rôle of a Russian play, *Natasha*. A young girl is pining for a true and great love; she suffers several disappointments, and, unable to endure the last and severest of these, she shoots herself on the night of a dance, while the rhythms of a waltz resound through the house. This was the rather poverty-stricken content of the doleful play. But Luise Dercum, in the part of the young girl, had created a figure of tragic melancholy, of poignantly sweet and morbid charm. In her every gesture her sad and moving story was implicit, in every inflexion of her voice the innocent woe that trembled above her fate. The end had been like a gliding down into the moonlit river of death, and ordinary, commonplace words had been transfigured into music.

Luise had invited Laudin to come to see her after the play. She had told him over the telephone that she really wanted to have a thorough business discussion with him; a proposal which he accepted with pleasure.

The profound emotion which he had experienced in the theatre had by no means disappeared when, towards eleven o'clock, he entered her studio. The place was swarming with people. With a distressed smile he remained standing near

the door. It seemed as though his innocent expectation was again to be disappointed. To-day, at least, he had hoped to find Luise, if not alone, at least in a small circle of friends. If anyone had paid any attention to him, he could have read on his features how annoying all this was to him: the brightness of the room, the laughter and chatter, the glasses and plates hurriedly passed round by helpful guests, the mixture of familiarity, wit, zeal and self-importance that marked the bearing of all these people. For he was probably the only one of the guests who came from a higher sphere, the only one upon whom the art of the actress had had the effect which was necessarily the aim of her highest ambition.

Perhaps Luise knew this. Assuredly she felt it. When she gave him her hand, and he bowed slowly and silently, there was a proud sparkle in her eyes. She held and pressed his hand in a way that made him very happy, because it seemed to express an understanding of his inner state. It might at least be interpreted as a silent mark of distinction. And his glance—that astonished and uneasily questioning glance, which seemed to say: Is it possible that you who stand before me, your ordinary, palpable self, are also Natasha? That one can return from such regions and associate with people, with inferior, colourless, meaningless people like these?—this glance she interpreted rightly, and somewhat ironically felt flattered by it.

After a few words relating to Ernevoldt he did not see her for a while. He only heard her laughter now and then, or the sound of her deep, husky voice. Several people addressed him. He answered courteously, but without grasping what they had said. Then someone uttered the name of Nicolas Fraundorfer. He listened, and approached the group in which the name had been spoken. This group consisted of actors and actresses, who were slouching about on sofas and arm-chairs, and carrying on a lively conversation. They were talking about Luise, who was sitting hardly three paces

distant, listening to a theatrical agent, who was speaking to her urgently, while the foppishly-dressed baron with the affected expression, who was sitting the other side of her, whispered to her from time to time. The people whom Laudin had joined were speaking of the humble beginnings of Luise's career, her unparalleled rise, and the incomparable good luck with which she now hastened from success to success. With all the usual ceremonies they conjured the evil spirits, rapping the table with their knuckles, and spitting. A very fat fellow, who, in spite of his jovial and satisfied smile, seemed inclined to make unfavourable reservations, and to intimate that after all, among colleagues, no one was in much doubt as to how things like that came to pass, raised his fat forefinger, and said that only six months ago Luise had been able to please neither the public nor the critics; people had shaken their heads at her; then suddenly the devil seemed to have got into her, and, be it noted, precisely since she had had that affair with the little conductor Fraundorfer. He had evidently become her mascot, all the more so since he sent a bullet through his head. A handsome young woman, who wore a feather boa round her neck, agreed excitedly, and declared that she knew many similar cases. Even the late so and so—she named a forgotten actor—had told her that the death of a lover brought success. She, by the way, had been present when Lu and Nicolas Fraundorfer had met for the first time. There had been something elemental about it, a regular *coup de foudre*, on both sides. "Well, Lu didn't waste any time on nonsense," said the fat man, and took his glass, and raised it in the direction of Luise. "She didn't have to be asked twice; she swallowed him whole. Isn't that so Lu?" he called over to her. "In that respect you always did have a magnificent appetite. Your health, Lu!" Obviously, no syllable of this conversation had been lost on Luise. Laudin, who stood motionless behind the chair of the lady with the feather boa, looked over to her in dumb expectation, prepared

for an outburst, for a blazing eye, for an indignant contradiction. Nothing of the kind occurred. She emptied her glass, beckoned carelessly with her hand, and, turning her head a little, said, as though she were bored and absent-minded and indifferent: "Don't bother me with your silliness, good people." That was her only answer, and her absent-minded, smiling glance touched even Laudin, whose pallor and immobility must surely have aroused her attention.

Dumbfounded, he crossed over to the opposite side of the room. He leaned against one of the pillars which supported the roof of the studio, and since he felt his forehead growing moist, he drew out a handkerchief. He gave a start when, in the vague distance, he became aware of a tall, distinguished-looking man in a dinner-jacket, who seemed familiar to him.

It was his own image in an obliquely-set mirror.

He heard a gentle voice asking him whether he was not feeling well. It was the voice of May, who had been watching him from the corner in which she had been sitting all the while, lonely and unobserved. He looked at her sharply, but did not answer, and when he stretched out his hand for a glass of water from the tray which a waiter was passing round, the hand trembled. "Did you hear," he asked shyly, "what those people there are saying about our friend? They're dragging her into the very mud, and she doesn't even defend herself."

"What were they talking about?" May asked, with an air of reserve.

"They were talking about a young man, the son of a friend of mine. . . ."

May's face grew even more reserved. She rose and came close to him. "You must forget everything that you hear about Luise," she said, and her moonstone eyes suddenly wandered uneasily. "It does not count, whether for good or ill. Luise is on fire, and fire is neither good nor evil. You can neither grasp it nor mould it. At times it will warm you, and

at other times destroy you. Cruel or beneficent, loveless or inspiring, true or deceptive—it does not matter. It is, and it lives. That is how it is with Luise. It suffices that she exists. If one takes her differently one despairs. I know that, I know that." She hid her face in her hands, and one could see a shudder running down her body.

Laudin raised astonished eyebrows. He had many proofs of May's almost slavish dependence on Luise Dercum. But he had tried to explain the relationship on natural grounds, on a basis of natural processes and feelings. Now, as his face showed, he saw it in a different light. He saw it as something uncanny, as something belonging to that order of phenomena which had always seemed to him unsound and unseemly, shunning the light, and by which any human being seemed to him excluded from the company of right-minded and morally responsible persons. He was rooted in another century. The people of the 1880's are allied by their attitude toward the world as though they were members of a single family. Any effort on their part to liberate themselves serves only to abrogate the law within them, but does not enlarge their mentality.

"It is probably as you say; there is at least that possibility," he stammered in his effort to be courteous and even agreeable; "undoubtedly we must admit the existence of exceptions." A little while ago he would probably have flatly refused to entertain such an explanation as this of May's, such an interpretation of a character which, though contradictory and obscure, nevertheless had its definite place, as well as its passionate ambitions, within the given social order. He would have answered somewhat as follows: I grant you that she is gifted, one of the elect, a creature of genius; this only increases her obligations; all the more should we trace a definite boundary lest we lapse into lawless chaos. Let us give her all due appreciation and the applause which she deserves and on which she is nourished. But let us be careful to grant

her no special rights, and above all do not let us transform the artist into a saint. If we did so she might well be tempted to turn our reverence into a farce.

Only a few weeks ago this, or something like it, would have been his reply. But to-day his judgment had been incurably darkened; he had been dragged out of his path by Natasha and by all that emanated from Natasha, from her mind and character, so that the actual Luise Dercum was but a shadow in his eyes, and Natasha, Kätchen, Hannele, Ophelia were the true originals—the oppressed, sensitive, soulful, innocent and ill-starred creatures—of whom, so to speak, the immanent Luise Dercum was compounded.

"You can do me a great service," he began, but stopped again as he became aware once more of May's reserved expression. With her curious intuitive power she had evidently guessed what he wanted of her. He bit his lips. Three words more, and he would have gone too far. He would have seemed a spy in her eyes, and a coward in his own. All this was incomprehensible; it was as though all paths were running into a labyrinth.

Luise interrupted them. Familiarly she put her arm into Laudin's and walked up and down with him. Guests still continued to arrive, but the room was large enough not to seem crowded. From the corner where the actors sat you could hear salvos of laughter. A few young men were leaning across a round table in the middle of the room; an outer circle gathered about them, while one of them, amidst shrieks of laughter, read aloud some humorous verses. By one of the tall windows a group was playing poker. Once more Laudin took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead. Walking beside Luise he had the feeling that he must be stepping over the bodies of men. He said in a modest and assiduously gallant tone that it was very kind of her to take pity on him. He had been on the point of fleeing.

She replied that she wouldn't have that, that he must stay.

They could walk to and fro quite calmly and privately. First of all she wanted to tell him what had taken place at the interview between May and Constance Altacher. Her features seemed to relax; something like a verbal impatience, something like a delicate appetite for words, appeared on her mobile lips as she began to speak.

Apart from the nonsensical outburst of tears and complaints, which seemed now to be part of Frau Altacher's regular repertoire, the concrete result of the interview had been as follows: She was willing to give May an annual pension—the amount to be determined later—for the space of ten years. The conditions were that May was to pledge herself in writing, firstly, that she would never make any further claims upon the Altacher family; secondly, that she would hand over to Constance the memorandum which the dead man had written concerning his marriage, as well as all the letters which he had written to May; thirdly, that in the document in question she was to declare under oath that no illicit relations had ever existed between Altacher and herself. So much for the conditions, Luise continued, in a contemptuous tone. And these monstrous demands had not even been made in a calm and businesslike manner, but to a repulsively fulsome accompaniment of all sorts of chatter about their common fate and their common sorrow. Constance had even hinted that she desired May's friendship and hoped for mutual confidences, since, as she said, a sorrow such as hers broke down all prejudices, and a life of misunderstanding and vain sacrifice such as she had led was apt to render the heart of a woman—or at least her heart—softer and more capable of love. Her emotions were as warm as ever, and it would be a joy to admit to her intimacy a creature who had been as close as May to her unforgettable husband. And so on, and so on. Luise was sure that Dr. Laudin would be glad to be spared a literal repetition. It would be clear to him that the woman was always emphasizing herself—her grief, her

fate, her magnanimity, the generosity of her spirit—it was all her, her, her. Yes, Laudin commented with lowered head: the same conceit, the unbelievable conceit. Very well, Luise continued. Two days later a letter had come from her in which, after discussing the matter with her lawyer, she had stated the sum of the pension. That was her tasteful name for it. (They are so tactful, aren't they, these ladies of good society, so considerate and delicate?) And what did Laudin think was the sum that this lady had mentioned, in her magnanimity and her newly discovered friendship for May? What did he think? She was ashamed to tell him. It was too laughable. It was the equivalent of what the State would give a superannuated porter; a mere charitable dole.

Luise came close to Laudin, grasped both his arms, and gave him a fiery, derisive glance, as though to say: 'There you have your fellow-citizens, your class, your world. Now, advocate that you are, defend yourself! She looked enchanting: this was certainly one of her "great moments."'

He had no reply.

"Yes," she murmured with a contemptuous twist of her lips, "they want to pay, they all want to pay. They want to pay for their errors, and those of their husbands and sons; for the injuries that they inflict on their chauffeurs and hair-dressers and on their husbands' mistresses. They are willing to pay. But not much. It mustn't be too high. A tip is enough, or a dole. They will wax enthusiastic, and swear that one has made a new being of them, and they will send one flowers—oh, yes, they will—and even poems. But they are just the same. When it comes to paying they begin to chaffer, and the temple becomes a den of money-changers."

Laudin was silent, as though he were really a condemned criminal, and had not noticed how cleverly she had associated May's affairs with her own. Then he said, as though consolingly, although he could not keep his bitterness from showing through, that he had found a statement in Altacher's corre-

spondence on the basis of which he could institute legal proceedings against Constance.

"What a crazy din!" said Luise vexedly. "My colleagues have reached the brandy stage. Let us flee. I have something else to tell you, my dear friend. Come."

As on the occasion of his first visit, she took him to the little room behind the studio, asked him to sit down, and herself sat down facing him.

She had no use for preliminaries. She preferred to come straight to the point. She wanted to talk to him about the film company. She could see in this plan the possibility of an unparalleled development of her talent. This, she thought, was the road not only to international celebrity, but also to wealth. She didn't care to work for any existing company, because she had definite and individual plans, the furtherance of which would probably clash with the purely mercantile interests of most of the existing companies. What those plans were she would confide to him on some later occasion. She had plenty of new ideas; her brain was seething with them. The theatre was dying; the theatre no longer affected great masses of people; the future belonged to the film. She had an offer from a German capitalist. She knew the man, but she didn't think much of him. He was a parvenu, and she had reason to fear both his vanity and his lust for power. She would rather get the money from a friend. So she had thought of Laudin. All she needed was thirty thousand gold marks. The security she had to offer was her talent, her name, her luck. She knew that Laudin was rich. She knew, too, that where her success and her cause were concerned he would have no trivial fears or hesitations. He must tell her what he thought of her proposal. There was no time for lengthy consideration. She must wire to Berlin in the morning. He must answer now: yes or no.

No more cold-blooded hold-up could be imagined. Yes or no. Your money or your life. Was Laudin really as rich as

Luise assumed in her privileged insouciance? Could he shake thirty thousand gold marks out of his sleeve? Wasn't he rather the careful father of a family, who had made his fortune little by little and administered it prudently? He wasn't poor, of course. He wasn't without means. Certain sums were invested, others were liquid. He had been an excellent manager. Political experience, as well as a certain pessimistic foresight, had been of advantage to him in this respect also. His practice, especially in the last few years, had been a very profitable one. It was common talk that many of his firm's bills of costs ran into hundreds of millions. He was a made man, one of those who count, a unit of the invulnerable. But the bourgeois spirit, based on money, moves within a limited and traditional circle, and is subject to limitations which have all the force of unwritten laws. It would be foolish and frivolous to alienate so considerable a sum from his interest-bearing capital, and devote it to a purpose which was questionable and dangerous, if for no other reason than that he had no expert knowledge of such matters, and could not judge of the results. This was a mere adventure.

True. On the other hand, a human and personal attitude, which had its moral obligations, was challenged to prove its worth. Here was Natasha or Kätschen or Ophelia or Hannele, and she said: Are you willing to stand by your attitude? Drop the mask! What are you—a mere enthusiast, a guest at the banquet, a spiritual voluptuary, especially if the emotions are cheap, or are you a confessor and defender of your faith? Is this jest or earnest? Are you priest or money-changer?

Luise, who was observing the perceptible signs of the advocate's inner conflict with malicious irony, lit a cigarette, and said, coolly: "Of course, thirty thousand won't do it all. It's about one-fourth of what will be ultimately needed. But we can begin on that. We'll rent our properties and write our own scenarios. I, your humble servant, am the principal draw. Max Ortelli, who is sitting out there, and who has just sworn

eternal fidelity to my plans, will institute an advertising campaign of international proportions. He's thoroughly experienced, the head of a big advertising concern, and is willing to take in payment a bundle of the company's shares. You, Doctor, will arrange all these legal and financial formalities. Once the thing is started, once it is known that our backer—the backer of the Phoenix Company—the man who is causing the Phoenix to rise from its ashes—is none other than yourself, capital will be forthcoming from other sources to any amount. Well, what about it? Have you decided?"

Laudin bowed. "You are extraordinarily expeditious," he said with quiet dignity. "The amount you ask is, of course, at your disposal."

"Good, very good!" Luise nodded. "That's what I expected. You are the man I took you for—a real person, a true friend. You don't try to escape; you don't twist and turn; your teeth don't chatter when it comes to really backing your tastes. Splendid! Thank you!" She gave him both her hands, and let him hold them firmly in his own. "We'll arrange all details to-morrow," she added.

"May I, too, ask a favour of you?" Laudin's tone was hesitating; he turned a serious, penetrating gaze upon her, and drew her a little nearer to him. "May I, if you have really accepted me as a friend, may I ask you, as a matter of honour and conscience, what was the meaning of the gossip of your various colleagues concerning you and poor Nicolas Fraundorfer? Don't be vexed, my child. Compared to me you are a child—marvellous and adorable, but a child. So I ask you not to be angry with an incorrigible pedant, and to take the burden of a doubt from his soul. What really happened? What element of truth was there in that talk? Was all of it mere gossip?"

Luise was utterly astonished. What talk did he mean? What gossip? Oh, what was said in there a while ago? Nonsense! What did Laudin mean? Such nonsense! She took her

hands away and passed one carelessly over his hair, lightly, yet with a mocking tenderness which caused him to look up, uneasy and intimidated, like an animal in a cage. She knew of nothing. Upon her soul and honour—nothing at all. It had all been swept away. Unfortunately, nothing much stuck to her—in either head or heart. But she'd try to remember what it was all about. But for Heaven's sake, why should he cross-examine her about that wretched old business! How extraordinary! Suddenly she grew angry. Was he an examining magistrate? She stamped her foot. An expression at once fierce and suffering came into her face. Was it a crime that she had kissed the boy? Should she have noted down the number of times and the days? Or should she have recited sentimental verses to him? She laughed. She clapped her hands, and stretched back her brown throat, and laughed; she knelt before Laudin, and crouched at his feet, and put her chin on his knee, and gazed at him with radiant laughter. And he, utterly overcome, dumbfounded, fought for breath, and sought to discover the meaning of this play-acting. If it was play-acting. For it was all impenetrable.

There was a knock at the door; someone pulled it open. Luise threw herself on the carpet, and still laughed and laughed. And a drunken voice quacked that lovemaking was not permitted here. Lu was to come along; she was needed; she was needed in a poker game. Laudin rose, and silently intimated that he wished to pass. But in the studio he was met by the sounds of a wild revelry, while from behind him came the ripple of Luise's laughter. The anteroom, too, was thronged, and even when he succeeded in getting his hat and fur coat he was forced slowly to work his way towards the door. Even here there was laughter, right and left—curiously aimless, cackling, rumbling, barking, trilling. Even on the stairs, even in the entrance-hall he heard that roaring, giggling, bleating laughter.

Since he wanted to walk part of the way home, he asked his chauffeur to drive on ahead to a certain street and there wait for him. A cold wind bit into his face. It was a clear, starry February night. He had not yet reached the first turning when he heard steps behind him. At first he paid no attention. But by and by, as these footsteps continued to remain audible at the same distance behind him in the otherwise deserted street, he became annoyed, he turned his head and listened. Tap, tap, tap, went the footsteps. Was it not as though that laughter had come out into the winter night, and had been frozen there, until it fell dumb, or dwindled to a mere tapping, but still persisted in following him?

He walked more slowly; the footsteps slowed down. He stood still and looked round. He saw a woman, well dressed, and apparently elderly. He stopped under a street lamp; the yellow rays fell upon the woman's face. Two eyes glared up at him. He recognized Brigitte Hartmann.

He waited for her. She came up slowly, watchfully, fearfully. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked, and measured her with his eyes. "What is the point of this pursuit by night, my good woman? You are taking to very strange ways. I don't understand. What do you want of me?" She stood before him, and looked on the ground, and murmured: "I just wanted to know how long you were staying with that play-actress wench." She pointed backward with her thumb and shrugged her shoulders.

Laudin regarded her as though he considered her demented. Hence his answer was moderate and tentative: "I've already told you that I don't understand. Presumably you have been drinking. You do not realize to whom you are speaking. A few days ago it was necessary for me to forbid you to annoy my wife. I advise you to read the letter I wrote to you more

attentively. You will see from it that I am by no means defenceless against such attacks as yours. Bear that in mind." He turned and walked on.

But a very strange thing happened. Brigitte took no notice either of his reproof or of the fact that, contrary to his habitual courtesy, he simply left her standing on the pavement. In a few seconds she was beside him again. Tap, tap went her footsteps. Her heels were apparently so high that they made walking difficult. Laudin increased his pace. He was furious, and he shuddered slightly. The footsteps, too, became swifter, and he heard the woman panting. And he also heard what she was saying. He couldn't help hearing it. It was an uninterrupted torrent, an incoherent and insensate flood of words.

Yes, she had kept watch; she wasn't to be put off; for two hours she had walked up and down in front of the house, in the bitter cold. It wasn't the first time either. Twice before she had sent her man from Hartmannshof, but he hadn't kept a good watch. It gave her no rest to think of his being with the actress woman. Doctor Laudin and a creature like that—it wasn't fitting. The whole world knew what sort of a woman she was. You had only to ask the dressmakers and the milliners, whose bills she never paid. Yes, anyone can have her—a mercenary woman, immoral and depraved. And she was a drinker. All the people employed in the theatre knew how she swallowed brandy by the tumbler, and could play best when she was half drunk. Oh, yes, she, Brigitte, knew a thing or two! She had once lived in the same house as an actress, and had seen the disgusting goings-on. A man so highly honoured and esteemed as Doctor Laudin had no business to have any dealings with such trash. Hadn't he a wife, and such a dear lady too? What would she think of it? And why was he hurrying so? Why was he running away from her? Was she mere dirt that he wouldn't listen to her? Her breath was giving out. And didn't he know how devoted she was to him? She had really determined to live a new life.

Since she had known Doctor Laudin she had become a different being. He had only to look at you and you had better feelings. But he mustn't, for God's sake, allow his firm to write such letters to her any more. She just couldn't stand it. She was willing to give Caroline Lanz twenty-five millions. Only he must have her account released! The shame of it robbed her of sleep. Even her sainted Hartmann wouldn't approve of that. She had been out there to call on Caroline Lanz, and she didn't see what those people were howling about. They were living very decently. There was no real poverty thereabouts. Shabby, yes. They couldn't indulge in luxuries, but there was no want, nor anything like that. She had taken some linen to the Lanz woman and some knitted dresses for the child. But that student brother had shown her the door. A grand gentleman, eh? Who in hell was he? So she had taken the things back with her again. The people in the house had told her that there was something not quite right about those Lanzas. Something was going on. Well, as for her, it was none of her business. But Doctor Laudin could see how much good will she was showing. And he mustn't, please, take her talk in ill part, nor what she had said about the Dercum woman, neither. It was just that she was an honest woman, and she valued morality above all things. It was only because she admired the doctor so, and would go through fire and water at a kind word from him, that she was watching, and was heartbroken over his pitiless treatment of her. But she was sure it was not his fault; he was much too noble; it was the fault of his clerks. There was a conspiracy against her; she'd known that for a long time; he had been set against her; and if this torture didn't soon come to an end (torturing a poor defenceless widow, if you please, who had two children to take care of), and if the doctor didn't pay any more attention to her than to a dog, and didn't even take the trouble to answer her—why, then, if you please, she would have to take certain measures, too, and she might forget she

was a lady. Because right was right, and where fidelity had been vowed it must be kept, or else the end of the world was coming. . . .

Tap, tap, went the ghostly steps.

There was his car. Swiftly Laudin entered and slammed the door. He swept the woman with a sinister glance, wholly unlike his usual expression. She stood in the middle of the street as the car began to move. Her mouth was half open, and one could see the gap in her teeth.

After a few minutes the car had melted into the darkness. Brigitte Hartmann was still standing there, motionless, like part of the night that lay heavy and black over the city. She gazed in the direction in which the car had disappeared.

The pain that a created being suffers is something absolute. With it the creature is face to face with God.

39

Marlene had invited a few friends, young people of both sexes, and Pia had had a fire lit for her in the terrace-room that overlooked the garden. Relly, too, had been given permission to invite two of her own friends, girls a little older than herself, of whose character and mentality Marlene had approved. They had very important business on hand; the founding of a society which all young people were to join who were resolved to create new and better conditions upon earth. It was to be a fellowship, and the purpose of to-day's deliberations was to establish its laws and methods of enrolment.

Laura Arndt came early, in order to have time for a little private heart-to-heart talk. She had not got over Nicolas's death; her whole mind was centred on him and his image, and since Marlene was far more reserved than she in respect of her inward experiences, she assumed that her friend had

consoled herself for her loss, and was naïve enough to make her own grief the constant subject of her conversations with Marlene.

But besides this the world was causing her all sorts of perturbations; owing to her beauty and her early physical maturity she was continually being pestered; sometimes she was really terrified; the result was an anxious vigilance, which distorted certain transactions in the lives of the men and women known to her, and was betrayed by symptoms of unwholesome excitement. Then she took her murky, fermenting ideas to Marlene, and Marlene had to interpret them and advise her.

While the two friends sat chattering by the window, Relly laid the tea-table. She did it with the gestures of the experienced housewife; held glasses up to the light, to ascertain whether they were clean, folded napkins into ingenious shapes, and arranged the plates of cakes and bread-and-butter in the centre of the table. She was disturbed while so occupied by her grandmother, who came in silently, muttering and wagging her head, wandered once or twice up and down the room, and then, coming to the table, asked her granddaughter, in a grumbling tone, for whom all these preparations were intended. Relly told her, briefly and drily. An amazed hiss, a sort of dental sigh, came from the old lady's lips. It was difficult to understand what she said, but it was something to the effect that in "her time" young girls wouldn't have dared to entertain people with all this feasting and display on their own account; no, nor yet twenty years ago; in "her time," that is, thirty or forty years ago, a family ball, some time about Shrovetide, was thought such a great affair that one talked and thought about it all the rest of the year; but such nonsense as was all the rage to-day, letting children of fifteen give tea-parties as though they counted and had a right to have a say in matters—thank God, one knew nothing of such things as that!

Relly looked at her grandmother with genuine compassion, and nodded, as though she too disapproved of this frivolous encroachment, but could do nothing to prevent it. When the old lady had left the room she said, turning to Marlene and Laura: "They always talk about years. Twenty years, thirty years, they say, and they expect one to be impressed. It's supposed to mean something: twenty years, thirty years; but it means just nothing at all. It's supposed to make you feel small; but it doesn't make you feel small. It's simply incomprehensible. It doesn't convey anything to me when one says: Three hundred years before Christ. Does it to you?"

The two girls to whom this speech was addressed did not reply. Laura had confided to Marlene that she was now convinced that Dr. Kadelka's wife was deceiving her husband. "He hasn't a suspicion," she said, pale with emotion: "he loves her; he gives her the most expensive presents; when she speaks he looks at her simply enraptured; he slaves for her day and night; he even speculates on the Bourse for her sake; and she is deceiving him behind his back, with a bank clerk, a common, uneducated man. Isn't it horrible?"

Marlene thoughtfully twisted her ring round her finger—a ring set with small pearls, a confirmation present from her mother—and answered, with a curious smile: "I don't like you to distress yourself about these things, Laura. It seems so inquisitive, don't you see? Even if it were really your business. It's so morbid. Of course, one ought to know things, and the more one knows the better; but to upset yourself on account of what Frau Kadelka may do . . . it's as though I were to take my heart and throw it into a bucket of dirty water."

"Do you despise such women so, then?" asked Laura, greatly impressed.

Marlene shrugged her shoulders. "I don't despise them: who has a right to despise people? but I just go on. And you

too; we've got to get beyond that. In another direction. You understand?"

She often used this phrase: "you understand?" It had a caressing sound on her lips; it was as though she were begging her friend to believe her or trust her. Now, as her guests were arriving one by one, she rose, greeted them, and said a few pleasant words to each, quite in the manner of her father. Relly brought in the tea and poured it out; all took their places in the order appointed by Marlene, and in eager conversation the clear voices of the girls mingled with the rougher tones of the young men. There were eight girls and six young men. Marlene's programme had allowed for only five, but Relly had insisted on the sixth, so that they should not be thirteen at table. The thirteenth was the son of a pharmaceutical chemist in the suburbs, small, clever, and sly, and not much liked on account of his slyness; the rest were serious and steady young fellows, a little embarrassed by the preponderance of the other sex, and uncertain of the sort of behaviour required of them; were they to be chivalrous and attentive, or intellectual? Of one of their number, Helmut Scharf, it was taken for granted that he was a poet; he had published some extremely modern verse in a periodical; he had a habit of letting a last decisive word fall into the scale at the close of a conversation. Another, a bashful youth, had a restless and creative mind; he was reputed to be an excellent speaker. His name was Herold; he was a clean-living, high-minded young fellow, of whom Marlene had a great opinion.

When they had finished their tea Marlene gave a sign, and they rose from the table; they then found seats in the turret-room that was built out on to the terrace, and there Marlene addressed a few words to the meeting. She reminded them of the purpose for which they had met together; it was known to them all, and it inspired all their efforts. There was not, she said, any question of a conspiracy, a secret understanding; there was nothing whatever mysterious about the business;

it was something that one could discuss openly and gladly, and it didn't matter who heard them. Their desire and intention was not to overturn anything already existing, but to create something that did not exist: in this, she believed, they were all agreed; agreed as to the difficulty and also as to the novelty of the proceeding. As a rule youth wanted to do away with something false, and applied all its energies to clearing it away; but when they wanted to put something good and genuine in its place they found themselves at a loss; in place of one mistake made by their elders they made three, and confusion became worse confounded. So wouldn't it be more proper to begin at once with the good and genuine, rather than to waste no end of time in sweeping things away and destroying them, and above all, talking and talking about it? Wasn't this, just this, the egg of Columbus? This wisdom, of course, wasn't of her own growing; at least, it wasn't entirely hers; it was the result of living with others who felt as she did, and she, Marlene, was acting as its mouthpiece only because, as they knew, she had a ready tongue.

She bowed archly, and concluded: "So we don't cry, 'Down with the schools, down with parents and teachers, down with government and authority!' but we do say, 'Up with ourselves!' We want to take things into our own hands sometime; so does everyone, of course; but first of all let us take ourselves in hand; that hasn't been tried yet. Not to do what's wrong; not to have any part in what's wicked and base; to renounce violence; each for himself, and each for all; to obey oneself; not to break faith with oneself: it is that, I think, that we want. And when I say, 'Up with us!' I look for a symbol for that 'up,' and I can think of none better than a flame, that epitome of light and heat and upward movement, and I propose that we call the confederacy which we are founding to-day the Union of the Flame."

It was young Herold who replied to this address. He described the previous speaker's point of view as too general,

too indefinite. There was no lack of such programmes for making the world happier; and where the evil had bitten most deeply, there the remedies sounded most seductive. Against the essential idea there was nothing to be said, as it represented, of course, a sort of crystallization product, the intellectual and volitional sediment of a generation, and one was conscious of it on every side, one felt it like a violent atmospheric change. Things had now gone so far that if a single mouth were to speak the decisive word a whole army of fighters stood ready to receive it. But if the small and inconspicuous circle which had now formed itself, and whose symptomatic significance, as he had hinted, was not to be denied, wished to extend its influence, and if its flame—not at all a bad banner, the flame—if the flame was to fire the lukewarm and the cold, then more definite outlines were necessary, and above all a strict discipline.

"What discipline?" some asked. "What do you mean? Do you mean rules? Do you mean statutes? Are we to play at being a club, an association, with conferences and beer-evenings?"

There was laughter, and Marlene called them to order. Helmut Scharf, standing magisterially with folded arms, said: "Perhaps he's thinking of a mixed order of monks and nuns!"

"Why not?" retorted Herold, unperturbed. "There are institutions whose original sanctity is not diminished by the fact that time has destroyed their significance." What he was trying to suggest was this: Laws which would be binding upon the members; vows, such as those which had of old been responsible for the attractive power and the moral influence of all the spiritually and culturally creative brotherhoods; he was thinking of the noble knightly orders of mediaeval Christianity, or the powerful masonic lodges of the eighteenth century; as for the ruler, he was thinking, for example, of the election of a supreme head, elected for

a definite term, but given unlimited authority; then the obligation of silence, not merely outside the society, but in all they did and resolved, "for the worst evil that we are suffering from is the word," he interpolated; "the spoken, current, empty word." And then, continence in every sense, and an inward resistance to all unbreakable coercion; and he called all coercion unbreakable which could be swept aside only by the squandering of means and the waste of living humanity.

Here began a debate, into which the girls flung themselves with even more passion than their male partners; in particular, a tall, dark seventeen-year-old schoolgirl, the daughter of a retired officer, became almost tearfully excited, because she would never, never be willing to accept what the others thought quite feasible, subordination to a spiritual regent. She was appeased only when Marlene, touched by her childish absoluteness, slipped an arm about her and gently assured her that no sort of rule was thinkable but one which would claim no arrogant privileges, and would be based on agreement and love; at which remark the sly chemist's son could not help grinning a little. Yet the principle of fictitious subjection met with disapproval; some saw weakness and hypocrisy in such obedience. But young Herold showed them, in words whose wisdom and significance was far in advance of his years, that the strength of minorities consisted in just this kind of weakness, and, making use of a curious expression, he described it as the system of the slow discharge of power.

"Very good!" cried Marlene. "Savings bank! Accumulator!"

Herold nodded. "Of course," he said, in confirmation. "Each one of us represents an accumulator, and it is an indisputable fact that a prophet, if he is a real prophet, makes a hundred, a thousand converts."

It was obvious that they were concerned with the highest

and greatest problems. The weal and woe of humanity, the future, life itself. These young heads had puzzled over the riddles of life until they were burning; these hot hearts were beating their way towards a new image of life. They did not need experience, they anticipated it, and perhaps some of the made and titled persons who imagine that they have the right to order the destiny and condition of the world because they have to carry and endure its burden would have been startled by these youngsters, and converted from the opinion that salvation depends upon grey hairs, tired lips and bowed shoulders. Perhaps they would have come to realize that between the achievements of their science and this ebullition of the heart there was, above all, a difference of temperature, which made nothing of their fancied advantages; perhaps they would have told themselves that for once, and tentatively, their old hands ought to lay the reins in these young, nervous hands, since all that they had achieved in the decades had not made them capable of guiding the monstrous steed. They would at all events have been amazed by the speech of these young people, by their faces, by the boldness of their words and their honest violence; they would have ceased to regard with disdain something that their dull unseeing eyes had never really beheld, and they might have abjured an error which was more and more avenging itself upon them: the mistaken belief that youth still looked up to them, trusting and expectant, that this was the duty of youth, and that one might and should feel reassured thereby, boasting of one's years, and treating a little deficiency in the measure of one's years as one would treat a certain deficiency in human substance. (Yet another case in which Laudin might have detected the phenomenon of conceit, a variety of this quality not hitherto investigated.)

While the exchange of opinions was at its liveliest Relly left the room. When Laura, at the door, asked her why she was going she replied that she wanted to get a little air. She

always felt uneasy in a room containing a number of people, and the sound of their voices gave her a headache. Even in the theatre or at a concert it sometimes happened that she had to get up and go outside for a time, and once she had told her sister that in such places she was often overcome by an invincible longing for a tree.

Now, as she crossed the landing, she happened to pass the half-open door of her mother's room, and glancing in she saw her mother, sitting strangely immobile before her mirror, her head supported on her arms, her face covered with her hands. Relly stood still. She hardly breathed. An expression of dismay crept over her features. She had never seen her mother like this. Fearing lest she should be noticed, horrified by the impropriety of spying, of which she had involuntarily been guilty, she turned round, walked a few steps on the points of her toes, and returned, rather paler than before, to the meeting.

She sat erect on her chair, studying the expressions of those about her, listening to their speeches, and apparently trying to come to some definite conclusion.

As Dr. Heimeran was one day turning the pages of his notebook he found, amongst many other things, a note that consisted of two words: Weitbrecht-Fraundorfer. It was some time before, on visualizing the scene at the bridge-table in the club, he was able exactly to recall the conversation that had taken place. Shortly after this he had occasion to confer with Laudin in regard to various matters. He found his chief and colleague sparing of words, and very indefinite in respect of the necessary information. Hence his tone, which he had meant to make friendly and sympathetic, sounded rather

coldly inquiring when he asked Laudin whether the actual circumstances surrounding the suicide of young Fraundorfer had ever been actually cleared up.

Laudin measured him with a sudden, swift look. "What makes you ask that?" he replied evasively, with an uneasiness that he was unable wholly to conceal.

Heimeran shrugged his shoulders and looked out of the window. He said he had just happened to think about it; there had been so much vague talk; he knew that Laudin had had particular reasons for sympathizing with the tragedy. Perhaps Laudin no longer remembered that under the first impression of the sad event he had confided to him, Heimeran, how disconsolate both he and the boy's father were. So it was no wonder, Dr. Heimeran said, that occasionally he should happen to think about it. But that was all.

He smiled a rather crooked smile and took his leave. Laudin had answered nothing, but had frowned and gone back to the reading of his letters.

Perhaps there was something both malicious and wayward in Dr. Heimeran's manner of dropping the subject without making the communication which he had intended. He was much too vain of his talents for bringing hidden things to light, and for cleverly combining apparently unrelated observations, to press the matter. He was given to gloating over his superior knowledge, and of chuckling while the people whom he called the laity, and whom he thoroughly despised, went astray out of sheer thickheadedness.

His vanity was wounded by Laudin's snub, although he knew perfectly well the reason for Laudin's unhappy mood on this particular morning. It was a communication from Dr. Kerkowetz, in connection with the Altacher case. Suddenly, curiosity began to gnaw at him. He recalled Laudin's relations with the actress, and Luise's with the young man who was dead. The figure of the unhappy father took its place in the plot. There was a possibility here of flashing a ray of light

into the darkness, of sounding a mystery, of making a discovery, and Heimeran resolved to see this Egyd Fraundorfer.

The very next day he called on Fraundorfer, and found him at home. He stood beside the huge man and looked up almost reverently into the latter's small, sleepy, drowsily-cunning eyes. "I had the pleasure of meeting you one evening last winter at the house of my respected colleague Laudin."

Somewhat morosely Fraundorfer admitted the fact, and asked his guest to sit down. Distrustfully Herr Schmidt slunk around Heimeran's chair, and his master winked at him, as much as to say: Well, we'll wait and see what's coming.

He started the conversation with a grim and ambiguous irony. "How is that highly respected colleague of yours? I don't see much of him nowadays. He hasn't been here for nearly a month. He seems to be drowning in his legal battles. Well, you have only to observe the world to see that it must keep the lawyers busy. That beastly hall-porter of mine nearly beat his wife to death yesterday. What did you say? You'll have to talk a little louder. For several days past I've been hard of hearing on the left side. What did you say your name was?"

Once more, and emphatically, Heimeran gave his name. Fraundorfer acknowledged the effort with a nod. Next he expressed a desire to know the purpose of this visit. He wasn't used to visitors nowadays. It surprised him to have anyone cross his threshold. He had forgotten how to behave on such occasions. He was afraid that his behaviour might be interpreted as rude, whereas it was only that of a shy cave-bear, although of mastodonic proportions. He laughed. "Go into your basket, Herr Schmidt!"

Although Heimeran was never alone and did not know what loneliness meant, he nevertheless had a sense of the loneliness in and about this man. He drily stated what had brought him. He told Fraundorfer of the conversation among his friends at

the bridge-table. He thought he might just as well keep to himself the length of time that had elapsed since then in order not to diminish the importance of his communication, which was, after all, only experimental. He told how, among other subjects, the fate of young Fraundorfer had been discussed, and how Professor Weitbrecht, one of the group, had casually remarked that the young man had been to consult him shortly before his death. Fraundorfer would undoubtedly be familiar with the name of Weitbrecht, the well-known syphilologist. Heimeran had felt it his duty to communicate this fact to the father, even though it might almost be taken for granted that he was already aware of it. Nowadays, thank God, young men no longer regard their misfortunes as shameful. Or was it news to Fraundorfer? It seemed to be.

The big man's gesture was like a short-circuit. A convulsive clenching of the fist inspired the other's question, which was asked with some satisfaction. For Heimeran saw at once that his errand had been justified. No other reward came to him, not even a word of thanks. From this moment on Fraundorfer lapsed into an almost fearful silence, and an ashy gray crept over his ravaged, spongy face. But the dark ignorance of the laity had once more been exposed, and Dr. Heimeran's ray of light had found its object. Further effects could undoubtedly be observed by watching Laudin. But since he was here at the house of the man who was well known to be Laudin's friend, it seemed quite natural to discuss the disquieting transformation in the character of the lawyer—a transformation that bore more and more the stamp of a mysterious ensnarement. It is curious that for some time past all Heimeran's observations concerning Laudin had a flavour of malice, of actual hatred of his once admired chief, who had formerly seemed to be enthroned, as it were, at an inaccessible height above him. How was this to be explained? Because the inviolable had not remained inviolate? Because the bright image had been darkened? The mediocre practitioners of daily life have

commonly no other divinity save some moral and intellectual superior in their own profession. And if he ceases to satisfy those exalted notions of the man by means of which they purify and ennoble their own souls, a revengeful bitterness awakens in them.

Fraundorfer had long been alone again, but he had not yet stirred. Nor did he stir when Frau Blum brought him his lunch. Hours later the food had to be warmed up, and even then he was able to force down only a few mouthfuls. During the whole day an iron heaviness was upon him. At nightfall he opened a bottle of old brandy; by morning the bottle was empty. He slept for sixteen hours. Then he tried to work. But the janitor's wife came to beseech him to use his influence with the police for the release of her husband. To be sure, the man had treated her with the utmost brutality, as the very condition of her body proved. But she simply could not get the work done alone. For a while Fraundorfer submitted to her noisy lamentations. Then he roared at her, and told her to go to hell, and pursued her with his rage to the top of the stairs. It seemed to relieve him to have found a pretext for anger and noise.

One would have expected of him to hasten at once to Professor Weitbrecht, in order to ascertain the truth or falsehood of Heimeran's revelation. Perhaps he had considered the matter; perhaps he felt a driving-force within him, and determined upon that errand from day to day and from hour to hour. And yet he did not go. He evidently could not bring himself to go. He was afraid to know. It would happen that, to the enraptured and expectant delight of Herr Schmidt, he would put on his boots and a clean collar and fetch his cloak from the wardrobe. But he never got farther than these preparations. They seemed to exhaust his strength. At the last moment he would look as though someone had thrown a noose about his neck and was slowly throttling him. A thick, quivering roll of fat made its appearance above

the bushy eyebrows. Again and again the huge hands were clenched.

One night Herr Schmidt was lying on the table with all four paws stretched out. It was a particular mark of his master's favour when he was permitted to do this, or was, at any rate, not prevented. And for this elevation of his tiny person in space, Herr Schmidt showed his appreciative understanding by not taking his moist, adoring look for one moment from his master's face. Fraundorfer, with a truncheon-like cigar in the corner of his mouth, one eye shut, the other sleepily open, holding a glass of hot, freshly brewed punch, delivered himself of the following speech:

"We must go to-morrow to that great medicine-man, Herr Schmidt. We ought to do so. Or the day after to-morrow. We must not put it off any longer. But I see already that we're going to shirk the job again. Our psychic mechanism seems to have a serious defect; one might almost call it a disease—a sort of retardation—cramp. Anything but accomplished facts! That was always our motto, wasn't it, Herr Schmidt? The irrevocable was always our pet enemy. I see that you quite share my opinion. Bravo, Herr Schmidt. Your intelligence is making progress. For the irrevocable is as sterile as death. Beyond it there is no consolation, not the shabbiest rag of consolation, not the shadow of a possibility of self-deception. That's the fact with which we have to reckon, Herr Schmidt, and by which we must be guided. When the barriers are closed—then look out! It is just as though someone were to say to you: 'Will you kindly come along to the knacker's? There you will find a swift, pleasing, and painless end. Life at old Fraundorfer's is not a bed of roses for you.' Would you, in spite of that, rashly plunge into that irrevocable situation? And even if this comparison of your conceivable path to the knacker's seems a little exaggerated to you, or even brutal, I must still beg you to consider: What then? Ah, this 'then' means that something

must, after all, be done. Or else there will be further irresolution, and further defects in the psychic mechanism. Ah, Herr Schmidt, what problems arise to plague us! First of all, we should initiate our friend, once called Dyskolos, into these new circumstances. But on this whole subject we had better keep our thoughts well caged. Let us be glad that they are behind bars. Let us not deceive ourselves, Herr Schmidt. Equivocal things arise here. Let us look elsewhere. Let us assume an innocent expression. And if by chance the bell should ring and he should enter by that door, let us be as friendly as ever. I desire it, Herr Schmidt, and I expect it it of your upbringing. Let us look frankly and openly into his eyes and give him no clues to the disorders of our mechanism. Let us practice the beautiful virtue of dissimulation. Do you understand?"

Eagerly Herr Schmidt wagged his tiny tail. Fraundorfer took a long and greedy draught from his glass. He smacked his lips. "I fear, however, that he will not soon appear before us," he continued, with a gloomily malicious expression, and in a voice that seemed to die away as in the muttering of approaching sleep. "We'll have time enough to catch all the fleas on our skin. It isn't even out of the question that we may have time to finish a new chapter of our history of human stupidity. In spite of the fact that between ourselves, Herr Schmidt, we don't consider the scribbling of books to be worth a damn. All that one does is to write over again what someone else has written better long ago. Very well. We'll not discuss that. No reason to feel annoyed because the Eukoloi and Dyskoloi furnish us with material for still more chapters. This one, who, for certain reasons, is not uncongenial to us, has poison in his corn-bin. He's like a merchant gone crazy, who adds up his debits on the credit side and lets his goods go for nothing to bankrupt firms. You remember what that skinned herring of a lawyer man told us the other day. . . . By the way, it isn't very appetizing

the way you're squatting on the table, Herr Schmidt! I endure it because I'm too lazy to punish you. Let it go. Let everything slide, Herr Schmidt; let everything be as it has been. . . ."

His chin sank upon his breast. He kicked the table and the empty glass toppled over. Herr Schmidt went to sleep, too.

41

It was not without difficulty that Laudin managed to raise the five hundred and five million crowns which were to constitute the main capital of the film company. Further difficulties arose in the course of the execution of other necessary formalities. Three times Luise Dercum changed her mind in regard to the choice of a bank. Her vacillation had the most childish motives. Against Laudin's advice she finally decided upon a banking-house of mediocre importance, simply because the personality of the managing director appealed to her. At all events this man had known how to throw dust in her eyes, and had lured her on by promising an unusually high rate of interest. This in spite of the fact that the interest mattered very little to her, as she freely admitted, since the money was to be spent and not invested. The careless largeness of her gestures in everything connected with money was astonishing. Sometimes, if she was in an irritated mood, she would order four new frocks at once, without thinking of ever paying for them. In her bedroom one simply trod upon unpaid bills. In this respect Brigitte Hartmann had by no means exaggerated. In spite of the carelessness with which she managed her affairs, there were quite a number of people who considered her greedy, and didn't believe in her openly expressed contempt for money. All sorts of opinions found their way to Laudin's ears; he heard whispers, too, that she

played for high stakes. A great many people seemed to take pleasure in communicating to him their opinions and estimates of the actress; God only knew why. What he heard was rarely favourable.

In the nature of things the banking account should have been in the name of the company. Luise opposed this violently. She declared that in the first place such an arrangement would interfere with her freedom of action. Unless her powers of disposal were unlimited, the whole business had neither sense nor purpose. In addition, she pointed out that if she had to wait until the company was incorporated and had agreed upon its articles and received its charter and elected its officers, precious and irrevocable time would go by, during which she would be waiting with fettered hands. Laudin had instructed her concerning the procedure dictated by the law. With great hesitation he yielded to her arguments. There were conferences, however, during which he had to veto proposals of obvious foolishness. Luise herself was far too deep in debt to make it advisable to open the account in her name. Nor was Ernevoldt to be thought of. Laudin knew that the man's financial situation was a desperate one, quite aside from his unpractical nature.

Finally, and after Laudin had refused to have anything to do with the advertising expert Ortelli, whom, in spite of Luise's impatient protestations, he characterized quite openly as an irresponsible windbag—finally, the plan was adopted of opening the account in the name of May Ernevoldt. Curiously enough, May refused to consent to this arrangement. She gave no definite reasons for her refusal; she merely said, and begged everyone to believe her, that to her money was the acme of everything revolting, and that if they got her mixed up with money matters she would simply run away. Nevertheless, her behaviour seemed to be further dictated by a definite fear, which she sought to conceal, but which, at the very moment when Luise, first tenderly, and

then angrily, tried to induce her to change her mind, burst forth with redoubled violence, despite her devotion to and affection for her friend. Since all emotional scenes affected her with the utmost violence, when at last her consent had been obtained, she had to be treated like an invalid, and put to bed in a darkened room.

Two days later seventeen thousand marks were transferred in the name of Bernt Ernevoldt to a German banking-house. Ernevoldt left town at once, and wrote to Laudin that he had gone to engage actors and buy apparatus. This didn't prevent him from first paying his most insistent creditors, and the accumulated rent of the villa, and buying a grand piano and a gramophone. Luise, too, suddenly decided to pay some of her most pressing debts, because she was being threatened with the seizure of her salary. The amounts which she drew amounted to between fifty and sixty millions. Although Laudin had not asked her to account for the money, she voluntarily denied that the money had been withdrawn from the bank. With wide, wondering eyes, and in a tone of child-like gratitude, she related how she had won the money at the gaming-table. It didn't occur to Laudin to investigate the matter. He had, as he told himself, given this money up as lost. But a few days later the bank made a mistake, and sent the notification of the withdrawal of funds to him, instead of to the holder of the account. The sum was precisely that which Luise had needed for the payment of her debts. He forwarded the slip to May.

Anonymous letters of an abusive and slanderous nature had always been incidental to his business. In the same post which had brought the betraying advice from the bank there had also arrived the following note: "If you imagine that that Dercum woman's lackey has gone to Germany to carry out the plans for which you've thrown your good money among that crowd, you're a poor, pitiable ass. We people in the theatre know better. Suppose you make inquiries as to

what a certain infamous crook lawyer K. M. and the even more infamous crook doctor R. Z. in Berlin get for keeping the unhappy Arnold Keller still in the madhouse."

The sheet flew into the waste-paper basket.

42

The "point" which, to use his own words, he had discovered in the correspondence between Altacher and May, and which he intended to make the basis of the proceedings against Constance Altacher, served him, from the very first, in his controversy with the advocate Kerkowetz. This was an incident which had occurred two years earlier. On the death of his mother, Edmond Altacher had inherited, among other things, a beautiful old miniature set with jewels. He greatly loved this little work of art, and he decided to give it to his friend May, to whom he had shown it, and who had been equally enchanted with it. Several stones were missing in the diamond setting of the frame, and in order to have these replaced he took the little picture to his jeweller. Constance had discovered this fact. A few days later she went to the jeweller and asked for the repaired miniature as though her husband had sent for it. The jeweller knew her, of course, and hastened to give it to her. When it was in her possession she no longer concealed from her husband the motive of her high-handed action and refused to surrender the picture. She said it was the property of the family, and as such a symbol deserving of pious regard, and that he had no right to withdraw it from the family. Since he didn't want the conflict to become acute, he was forced to yield. In a letter which he had written from abroad shortly after this incident he told May what had happened. The only explanation he could give of Constance's knowledge of the facts was that owing to his

carelessness she had probably succeeded in getting hold of and reading an earlier letter of his to May, in which he had mentioned the miniature. At that time he and May corresponded a good deal.

This action on the part of Constance Altacher Laudin interpreted as the illegal seizure of a documentarily recorded gift. Without overemphasizing the incident, which would have been a tactical mistake, he nevertheless used it as the psychological basis in the preliminary conferences with Kerkowetz. The suit for the payment of the legacy was of course quite as hopeless as the counter-suit for the repayment of the various sums which Altacher had actually given the Ernevoldts. In fact, the whole affair had from the very beginning the character of a sort of juridical egg-dance, and although Laudin betrayed a stubbornness which was hardly conducive to success, and he became more and more stiffnecked in his attitude, he never felt comfortable about the business. His attitude was not that of a man who, in the course of a very intricate piece of litigation, represents the by no means wholly defensible, yet genuine interests of one of the litigants. He acted as though he were on the warpath against the hereditary foe of society, as though the fate and right of many people depended on the outcome of this conflict. Apparently it was once more the phenomenon that spurred him on and excited his wrath. His vision of the world grew more and more distorted. This was evident from his glance, his gait, his gloom, and the altered rhythm of his daily life.

The written replies of Dr. David Kerkowetz were incomparably shrewd; his politely veiled sarcasms and cutting submissions and derisively humble corrections disturbed Laudin indescribably. He grew white as chalk after reading the first of these fluent, perfidious epistles, that offered no point of attack on their slippery surface. He felt profoundly that he was unequal to this adversary, that he could not hold

his own in this duel, or in this cause, which was more like a spiritual catastrophe than a professional task and obligation. It had been breathed into him, he knew not whence, stamped upon him like a token, he knew not by what hand; it was like a dream that had dragged itself on into the day. And Kerkowetz, the champion of the enemy, opponent and adversary, was half obscured by a turbid mist, and thus gained advantage after advantage.

Kerkowetz's third reply was accompanied by the letter of Laudin's which had elicited it. The final sentence of this letter, which Laudin had dictated, was thickly underlined in red, and adorned on the margin by two large red question-marks. The sentence in question was harsh, dry, unprofessional: "There is no possibility of our reaching an understanding. Between us lies a world which my foot will refuse to tread until you have succeeded in driving me out of my own."

Laudin was petrified. He couldn't have said that! He couldn't have dictated that! How could it have occurred to him to utter such a challenge, such an insult, such an empty boast? His voice was hoarse as he called in his secretary. He pointed with his finger to the passage. The girl did not understand. Then the constriction in his throat was loosened and he began to roar. For the first time in the history of his professional activity he was heard to roar: "Who wrote this down? Who is the author of this sentence? Who is guilty of this folly, this madness?" Kappusch, Heimeran, the assistants and the secretaries rushed in. Kappusch tried to quiet him. The girl look on, terrified. He foamed: "Bring me your shorthand notes!" The secretary disappeared. He walked up and down with great strides, tormented by the mystery. After a few minutes the girl came back and silently handed him the book with her notes.

The sentence was there. He had dictated it. He wasn't conscious of having done so. He had spoken the words without

knowing it. Confusedly he looked about him. He frowned, and with a strangely melancholy self-modesty he turned to Heimeran: "It almost seems to me as if proof of identity were necessary here."

There was a brief discussion. He tried to explain the matter somehow to his colleagues, who feigned to find his explanation plausible. There was nothing to do except to offer a formal apology. A letter was sent by messenger to Kerkowetz. In this letter regret was expressed that a mistake due to the absent-mindedness of a clerk in mixing up two different dictations had given rise to this unfortunate incident.

An hour later, in the lobby of the law-court, Laudin suddenly found himself face to face with Kerkowetz. Both were in their advocate's robes, which gave their meeting a touch of almost unreal solemnity. Silently they looked at one another. Then Laudin bowed; Kerkowetz, externally a fatty imitation of Napoleon, responded with cool reserve. There seemed to be a sort of triumph in his bearing. But he was the sort of man who is born with a triumphant expression.

43

Ernevoldt wired from Berlin: "Arnold Keller discharged from institution prior to my arrival. Present whereabouts unknown. Inform Luise."

Coming from this source, Laudin thought the alarm excessive and impudent in tone. Since a certain pedantic prudence was in his blood he could not help reckoning up at times how much of his time he gave without any reward to the affairs of Fräulein Dercum. The fact that he did all these things voluntarily did not rob him of the feeling of being exploited. But such thoughts stirred within him only in moments of weariness, or when he asked himself what

was to be the upshot of it all. There were other moments, too, when there came to him the surprised, regretful, many-tongued rumour of the world. Yet if Luise called him he followed, and when she commanded he obeyed; when she smiled ease stole round his heart; when she lamented he found the air too heavy for his lungs. Whenever the golden brown shimmer of her glowing eyes was upon him, he was at peace with the world.

He read all the daily papers in the hope of coming upon her name. The criticisms that appeared about her he cut out carefully and collected them like an undergraduate, who in his secret rapture follows from afar the phases of the life of some adored star of the stage. He had acquired the habit of subtly turning the conversation even with the most indifferent persons in the direction of the theatre. And since the name of Luise Dercum was upon all lips, it was not long before it was pronounced. From that moment he fell silent and became all ears.

We can see lips curl in irony, and the wise in their own conceit shrug their shoulders. But they are mistaken. This is not the place to obtrude experiences that are as common as blackberries. From a hundred hints and indications it must now be clear that a spirit such as Laudin's, an inquiring spirit, and one that measures the world by its own innate measure, has the right to nullify and to deny the judgment of those who, fortified by some experience, interpret his inner state by means of stereotyped expressions and conventional estimates. He is beyond both their smiles and their pity. For they forget that Laudins are not to be met in every street, and that a woman like Luise Dercum is, after all, more than a titbit for bourgeois epicures.

In his private notes Laudin himself made merry over the possibility of his being in love, of his nursing the belated passion of an ageing man. And although this fact in itself is no sufficient proof of the entire absence of such feeling,

since in these matters self-deception knows hardly any bounds, yet the scrupulousness of his mind and his strict and habitual veracity leave room, at least, for the existence of more mysterious emotional backgrounds.

There could, at all events, be no question here of empty enthusiasm or of an unbridled imagination. There may have been this danger for a moment at the very beginning. There was a moment when the spectacle of this impetuous temperament blazing upon its way, and the broad-minded, cultivated man's rather naïve conception of a priestess of art, obscured his vision, but three days' actual contact with Luise was enough to destroy that image; and enough to raise a kneeling adorer from the dust, and turn him into an ordinary admirer of the kind that always follow in the wake of the cart of Thespis.

Let us not forget that the occasion of his seeking out Luise Dercum had been the death of an admirable youth. He had entered the circle of this woman in order to put an end to the dark broodings of a stricken father, to soothe that father's raging grief, which quarrelled with man and God, and also in order to quiet a tormenting restlessness within himself. In brief, he had acted under the dictate of a higher law. She had willingly given him the information that he had asked. No elaborate investigations had been necessary. The story was apparently a simple one. It was perhaps too simple. Did he believe it? Was there no suspicion in him? Did he take it all to be genuine? It is hard to say. But we should be doing this experienced jurist an injustice did we not assume that from the very first doubt had stirred more and more strongly behind his courtesy and kindness, and had ever since stood strictly on guard. It must not, of course, be forgotten that at their very first meeting he had been under the influence of what seemed to him an artistic achievement of overwhelming brilliance, and that this impression, far from decreasing, was heightened from day to day, from

meeting to meeting, and grew more complete and lasting. And this enduring and overwhelming impression was made upon a nature modest to its very core, so that it acknowledged another's superiority with delight, almost with a kind of humility, expressed outwardly in timidity, consideration, and unfailing respect.

Then, from all sides, came the whispers of gossip. He could, at need, have armoured himself against these. For twenty years he had been living in a constant whirlwind of slander. What men said of one another, and what it was his business to hear—this had long turned his whole life into a muddy puddle, and had even seeped, a concentrated poison, into the well-varnished joints of his private life, if indeed he could still be said to have a life of his own. But the gradual and merciless stripping of appearances, the way in which people saw and listened to themselves, the acquired knowledge of things in the faces of loafers and parasites and flatterers, things which those people took as matters of course, these escaped him—were kept from him by a sort of tacit conspiracy, as one keeps from boys the scabrous adventures of men of the world. Why was this so? he was forced to ask himself, for apparently he did not know that the essentially pure wear an armour that seems to close itself hermetically against the impure, who are capable of an immediate understanding among themselves, since they commonly inhabit the same dunghill. Far worse, and even stranger, was Luise's betrayal of herself—this frivolous, laughing, cynical betrayal which was a mixture of forgetfulness, curiosity, high spirits, and provocation. It is impossible to say why she dared to sacrifice and reject his reverence and admiration, and to deceive his confidence. Why? To gratify a mere whim? It was as though she had not the slightest regard for what was really magical and divine within her; as though this were something to be trodden underfoot unless it expressed itself in applause, in newspaper paragraphs, in the figure of her salary.

Nor was it this alone that made him gloomy, and strangely abstracted, and curiously unreliable in his bearing, and more and more unreliable in the conduct of his whole life. Insight into untruth and a knowledge of untruth are not bad, good people; no, my few friends, and you, Pia, and you, my daughters, and you, small son, they are not wholly destructive, even if we became so implicated with untruth that it seemed to become, as it were, a part of ourselves. That which is evil is only the spiritless subjection in which untruth enmeshes us, with imperceptible cunning, filament by filament, amiably playing with us and—God protect us!—sustained by an apparently magical element.

It was a lie when she said: I've been to the coffee-house. She had been to the fashion show. It was a lie when she said: I've been to the fashion show. She had been out driving with some rich fool whom she was luring on. It was a lie when she said that she had seen one man beating another in the street. It had been a mere altercation. She said she had been ill during the night and had had to call in a doctor. It was a lie. Or that she had read an interesting novel and had had such and such thoughts. It was a lie. She hadn't the patience to finish a letter. She never read a book. She had been asked to play in America. Not a word of truth in it all. Her emerald and platinum ring, she said, was a legacy from her grandmother. An absolute invention. Her grandmother had been a charwoman in Olmütz. She told the story of her early youth: Seven brothers and sisters, all delicate, three of whom died in three successive years; her father was a highly gifted engineer and bridge-builder who had been brought to ruin by the persecution of an implacable enemy, and who ended by seeking refuge in drink; her mother had been a dancer of European celebrity, whom a disappointed lover had shot in the hip on the stage, so that she was condemned to the life of a cripple. All this was the merest invention. For several days later her father had become the owner of a circus and

her mother a former Baroness Schlichtenfels, or some such story. She told no incident of her past which had any relation, however remote, to reality. If at any time it was actually necessary to establish some simple fact, in connection with legal proceedings, for example, or the procuring of a passport, she pretended that her birth-certificate was lost, and said that she had been born in some famous city, and not in the wretched village in which her cradle had actually stood. In the end, of course, she had to eat her own words. But she did that with the charm of a fairy-like being whose lips had never known the soilure of untruth, and with a smile which forgave those who had for five minutes believed her.

It was the same even in higher regions, where there was no possibility of checking her lies or divining her purpose. God dwelt in her heart; with profoundly moving devotion she spoke of the holy sacraments, of confession and communion. She could be seen praying in church; she threw herself on the flagstones, and, in the manner of the Italian women, hid her head between her outstretched arms. At a street corner she gave alms to a beggar; twenty paces farther she turned back and gave him more; she had been absent-minded and given too little. This with an inimitable upward gaze. If compassion could become incarnate, here was its incarnation. The suffering of the world penetrated her to the bone and robbed her of sleep. And yet it was only yesterday that she had been as impassive as a stone when poor little Fräulein Markmann was sobbing at the door of her dressing-room, because the celebrated and all-powerful actress refused to play opposite her; without any reason, without any explanation, out of the mere obscure hatred of woman for woman. She was all for the just division of the goods of this earth; the communistic ideal inspired her to the point of prophetic eloquence, and there was no violence, no bloodshed that she was not willing to excuse or even to commend for the sake

of this exalted dream. This did not prevent her—since she was never sated with gold and silk and brocades and laces—from senselessly wasting unheard-of sums, from drowning all vexations, as well as the stirrings of all true feelings, in champagne, and from planning to make a sensational film of Charlotte Corday's heroic act of judgment.

But she probably knew little or nothing about Charlotte Corday. Some scribbler, no doubt, had told her the tale.

She was the most impassioned of friends; the most melting assurances, the fieriest vows moved the heart of anyone, man or woman, who pleased her or attached himself to her. And it might easily happen that twenty-four hours later she would pass such an individual in the street without a greeting, for the simple reason that she really didn't remember him. Two or three women had played a real part in her life, and five or six men. For these she did entertain a kind of fidelity, an almost animal gratitude, which was commonly based upon the fact that the individual in question had totally suppressed his own will, had been at her service like a mere implement, had lightened her boredom, soothed her rages, and endured any kind of maltreatment at her hands. She treated the majority of her lovers like the useless trash of which she would occasionally empty her drawers in order to provide space for a new supply. This one or that one had at some time been good for something—had flattered her vanity, or amused a dull hour, or satisfied a whim or a thirsty moment of sensual impatience. She admitted no claim. A wild night of love; next morning her lover was already a stranger.

Laudin knew all this. He had recognized it, perceived it, felt it, and had silently added up his observations, and, without any illusion, recorded their sum. She had sworn eternal friendship to him too; friendship to the death. In the excess of her gratitude and almost submissive devotion she had gone so far as to assert that her heart was pledged

to him for ever, and that only since she had known him had she arrived at a true conception of the possibilities of manhood. And considering the magnificence of her eloquence, considering that voice, whose very sound could stir the soul, it goes without saying that he did not remain unmoved. But he knew that she needed him. He knew that in certain respects he had become indispensable to her. He knew, furthermore, that she bathed herself in the deliciousness of her own speech as in fragrant waters, and enjoyed the sound of her voice as though it were the playing of a violin. He knew that her promises were worthless, that she forgot agreements and pledges, literally the next minute; he knew that she lied if she merely said: Let's be alone together to-morrow for fifteen minutes, or: I wrote to my brother about you yesterday (she probably hadn't a brother); and that it hadn't the least significance if she nestled against his shoulder, tenderly, half daughter, half exquisite seducer, and looked up at him with a happy smile. She was capable of denying him the next day without the quiver of an eyelash.

Whatever happened to her or around her was immediately obliterated from her mind. She retained no image of it, nor did the images evoked by herself retain their features, colour, or continuity for an hour. Corrupted by a sound, seduced by an association, she exchanged both experiences and people as one shuffles cards. She would lavish her coquetry on a theatre fireman, and would be insolent to people to whom she was indebted. And why? There was no reason. No one could find a reason. She was capable of maligning an honourable man as though he were the most unscrupulous of rogues. But she did this almost unintentionally. It just slipped out. The moment seemed to call for it. She liked the resulting scene. She liked the surprise in the faces of her hearers, and while she did the work of a poisoner with a melancholy upward glance she looked like an innocently astonished child who makes a hole in her doll and watches the sawdust spill.

She was a past-mistress of amazement, harmless and frightened amazement, of the small, sweet, equivocal emotional stirrings, of the undecided, doubting, questioning, helpless gestures and looks that were not yet those of a woman and no longer those of a virgin. To every attitude she gave the masterly, complete, and absolutely individual expression that only her personality could lend it: grief, fear, delight, scorn. This was a thing that one must have experienced to appreciate: and who, having seen that, could resist it? She was intelligent when it was expected of her, and ignorant with the sweet ignorance of Marguerite, when that suited her book. She could be teachable or stubborn, modest or shameless. She sensed the echo that was expected of her and gave it forth. She would slip into a word, and the word would extend at her will like a rubber bag, and she obtained from it all that she needed. By sheer ability she could transform herself into beings of whom there was no trace within herself. One day she would be a small, lovable, helpless, over-taxed creature who must be tenderly guarded in order that she might be reconciled with a harsh world. She seemed so humble that one had to give her a little self-confidence as one gives medicine to a sick and tired child. And to-morrow—to-morrow!—an hour later, with a new public, or even with the same, she had become the angel with the fiery sword, the tragic muse, a Jacobin and a rebel, probably just the figure which the most credulous and most useful of those present desired to see in her. And for such perceptions her instinct was unerring. . . .

Such was the knowledge of her that Laudin had gained. He had gained it step by step, like a man who cuts his path through a bamboo jungle—not without lacerating his hands. And yet, and yet. . . .

This was where the background began.

44

When he entered his office one afternoon he found a visiting-card on the table. The name on it was that of Arnold Keller. The hand holding the card trembled. He pressed the bell-push. "Connect me at once with 16-6-28," he told the secretary, who had entered the room. It was Luise's number. "The lady is not at home," he was told. "Call up the theatre," he commanded. He was informed that the lady was not at the theatre. "Then telephone the Ernevoldts and ask for Fräulein Ernevoldt." Fräulein Ernevoldt was out.

He took up the card once more. "She must be told to-day," he murmured. He went to the door. "Ruediger!" The old attendant emerged from the dim ante-room. "Yes, sir?" Laudin held up the card. "When did this gentleman call?" About an hour ago, was the answer. He looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past four. "Order the car!" he cried. It turned out that Fräulein Dercum, to whom he had lent the car for the morning, had not yet sent it back. He himself had lunched in the city. He ordered a taxi. Just as he was about to go he was called up from home. The maid asked whether Frau Laudin could have the car for a couple of hours. She wanted to take her mother on an important errand. He answered that he was very sorry, but that he had for the moment lent the car to a client.

Then he drove to Luise's flat.

45

The studio room was thronged with people. They were trying to rehearse a scene for the films. All the furniture had been pushed against the walls, so that the room seemed doubly

large. A pock-marked man was directing. He roared until his voice cracked. Six or eight women supers, barefoot, dressed only in a shift and a short skirt, crowded together near a window and chattered like a flock of geese. Another actress, also half-naked, with dishevelled hair and cigarette in mouth, was trying to imitate a pose at the direction of the pock-marked man. The camera-man cursed and swore at the hired camera. Someone stood high on a ladder, fastening a blind over the window.

No one paid the least attention to Laudin. People came and went. He turned courteously to an elderly gentleman who was unrolling a shrilly painted back-drop. He asked after Luise. He was told that she was expected at almost any moment. He asked where she was. A shrug of the shoulders. He looked helplessly about him. The reek of powder and sweat annoyed him. The naked limbs and torsos of the women were unreal and chalky. The yells of the pock-marked man hurt his ears. The man was in a rage over the inadequacy of the camera and the props. If you were going to make a film, he said, everything had to be *À1*. You could have the finest scenario and the greatest actress—a Dercum if you liked—but if anything wasn't *À1* the whole thing was a frost. He gurgled like a dying man.

Laudin went out into the hall. A carpenter was hammering at a trestle. A door opened, and Luise's maid appeared. When she caught sight of Laudin she turned to him with a bitter appeal. She couldn't stand this ménage any longer; she hadn't hired herself out to a booth at a fair; she was going to pack her things and go; this was no kind of a house for her; rowdyism every night till four o'clock; people spent the night all over the place, as though it were a shelter for tramps; well, there were other things she wouldn't mention. Anyhow, she had had enough.

The carpenter interrupted his hammering and looked up and giggled. Laudin buttoned his coat. "Be so good as to

tell your mistress that I was here on a most urgent matter." He took out his purse and slipped a note into the hand of the rebellious maid. It was a cowardly action; perhaps it was merely one of sheer disgust. He didn't want any return for it. He only wanted to assure his own aloofness, which, he feared, would be invaded.

Hesitatingly the girl took the money. As though moved or astonished, she repeated softly: "Oh, yes, Doctor, if I wanted to talk . . ."

He waved her aside and left the hall. He felt that he must see May. He drove to the Ernevoldts'. It was half-past five when he rang the bell at the gate of the villa. The gardener's boy opened the gate; he didn't understand his question, but let him go into the house. He waited. No one came. He passed from room to room and saw no one. He had been here once before with Bernt Ernevoldt. He thought he might take the liberty of looking about him. Perhaps, too, his restlessness made him less formal than usual. Ernevoldt's wire had left him cold; the fact of Arnold Keller's personal appearance on the scene filled him with consternation.

While he was waiting here, really without reason, his restlessness increased, intensified by something oppressive in the homelessness that brooded in these low and narrow rooms, a sense of neglect, as though things were covered with mildew. Furniture, carpets, pictures, bore the stamp of luxury and of ruin. Here a door-knob was broken; yonder was a rent in the wall-paper; the gilt had cracked and fallen from a picture-frame; cold ashes lay in the fireplace, and the dust of weeks on a table. And all this ruin had a spiritual quality, and you knew that it had been going on not only for weeks but for years. Dwelling-rooms do not so much tell you what people do, as what they are.

Intending to go, he rose at last, but passed once more through the adjoining rooms, and entered one at the threshold of which he had previously turned back. Through a glass

door he became aware of two old women playing cards at a table. A third old woman, who wore a green shade over her eyes, sat in an arm-chair and slept. These were the aunts and the mother of May and Bernt. There was nothing peaceful about this picture. The three emaciated old women, with their white caps on their heads, two of them throwing cards on the table in that strange hush, looked almost ghostly. When he turned away and returned to the first room, which was the sort of writing-room that one would find in a *pension*, May entered at the opposite door.

Twilight had fallen. He could scarcely distinguish her features. Only her silvery hair gleamed in the dusk. A brown, close-fitting street dress made her figure smaller and slighter. She still wore a glove on her left hand; she was about to take it off, and stopped half-way at the sight of Laudin. "What has happened? What brings you here?" she asked under her breath.

He went up to her, and bowed, and said in his deep, musical voice that he must apologize for this visit. He had been at Luise's house, and had missed her, and had waited here in order to discuss an event that was of great importance to Luise. He told her of Arnold Keller's visit to his office.

For a while May was silent. He could not see the expression of her face. Finally she said, in an oppressed tone: "She must be told. She must be told at once. I don't know what might happen. I don't know how she'll take it. I don't know the man myself, and I don't know much about him. I think there must be something evil in him, and probably dangerous. What do you think?"

He answered that his insight was as imperfect as her own. All he had to go on were the reports of Luise. Still, precautions were undoubtedly necessary. One could never tell what a man like that would do. His unexpected appearance was strange enough.

"Luise is playing to-night," said May, "and we ought not to tell her before the play. But she is off after the second act at nine o'clock."

"I'll be at the theatre at nine," Laudin answered. "I'll take Luise home, and perhaps you'll wait for us there. Someone ought to be there, to prevent the man from laying siege to the flat. When will your brother be back?"

May whispered that she didn't know. It was curious that she didn't think of switching on the light. Nor did he. It was as though neither desired to see the other's face; as though they feared the light.

"It isn't my fault that he went on this trip," May continued. "I begged to have nothing to do with the money. Whenever Bernt has money he becomes utterly irresponsible. It has always been so. If he has a single gold coin he plays the man about town, the Mæcenas. When it is gone he collapses. He can resist no temptation; his reason leaves him completely. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. And now I am responsible. I feel clearly that you think me responsible; you might as well say it."

"Nothing is farther from my thoughts, dear May," Laudin murmured. "You can be quite calm on that score."

She shook her head. Her head was bowed; her arms hung nerveless. With a melancholy, scarcely audible voice, she continued: "You are not conscious of it, I know. But you demand an accounting from me, and you demand the truth of me. I feel it. You have only to look at me and I feel it. It torments me. I've asked myself sometimes if I am the conscience which has become detached from Luise. Perhaps I am. Luise has no conscience. I am that conscience. I am condemned to walk beside her and to suffer." She wrung her hands; Laudin, moved and amazed, was silent.

"But I am equally condemned not to speak," the young girl continued, her attitude unchanged, "that is to say, until to-day, until to-day. For to-day you demand speech of me

so imperiously that I feel like running from the room. And that other time, too . . . when you asked me about Nicolas. . . . How could you do that? The truth, ah, dear God. . . . When the dead come to one they demand the payment of all the debts one owes. I see him eternally stretching out his arms after her in vain. And I hear her laughter, her terrible laughter, as though he had been a clown. And every night I see him; he appears before me with that wound in his flesh——”

“What are you saying, May?” Laudin cried hoarsely, and he grasped her wrist so violently that she was forced to bend forward.

In the pallid light that came in through the window he saw that her eyes were closed. With the index finger of her free hand she pointed into vacancy, and said, in an almost singsong tone, with the strange, terrifying innocence of a mad little child: “Yes. Of course. That’s what she told me. She told it jubilantly. That she had doubted him. That she had no more faith in his love. No, no; it wasn’t that at all. It was only a game. She wanted to play with him. She did believe him, but she had determined to put him to a test. She had wanted to find out how far a human being could go under the influence of a great passion. It is all a game with her. And she doesn’t acknowledge the existence of any limitations. He lay at her feet and begged and begged, because things change so from day to day. And she pretended that she didn’t want to have anything more to do with him. She had a poker in her hand, and was absent-mindedly tormenting the desperate boy with her jeers and sarcasms. And it was all a game, all of it. And then she drew the red-hot iron out of the fire, and held it up to him, and said: ‘If you are real, and not only afflicted with calf-love, then press this iron to your breast.’ And, incredible as it may seem, he obeyed her and pressed the red-hot iron into his flesh. There was a hissing; then there was smoke. So Lu told me the story.

And she added that the night that had followed had been the most beautiful night of her life! Think of it!"

Laudin had stepped back several paces. He groped about him, and took hold of the back of a chair, and sank into it. Cold sweat started out all over his body. "You are talking in madness, May," he stammered. "You are losing yourself in phantasms. Let us not waste our time with images of demons and invented devils. Let us use our reason. I will forget all this. It shall be as though I never heard it."

"And do you think that was all?" May cried out, sobbing, and pressed both hands against her forehead.

With an extreme effort at self-control Laudin restrained himself. "It's enough, my dear May," he said, with apparent friendliness, and got up. "I think it's best, now, for me to leave you alone. Your nerves are in an over-excited condition. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to turn on the light. I can't find the switch. I've put down my coat and hat somewhere, here. I must go. I still have work to do."

May went up to the wall. The electric bulbs burst into light. Pale as death, she seemed to be taking refuge in a corner. "Do, please, stay," she besought him. "Stay ten minutes more. I'm so frightened at being alone."

Laudin hesitated, and considered, and stayed. His powerful head bent forward, his jaw twitching nervously, he stood beside a table and mechanically drummed with his fingers on the cover of a book.

May had folded her hands and pushed them between her knees. "No, my story is not one of devils or evil spirits," she whispered. "You read about such things in books. I know it. But this reality is utterly different. You can't explain it. But it is so terribly, so absurdly different." She raised her eyes and her voice a little, without losing the shyness and depression which had come over her since the lights were switched on. "There is only one thing I should like to know, one thing, and that is, what it is that draws you, Dr. Laudin, to Luise,

and lures you on. A man like yourself. It is very mysterious to me. If I knew that, it would be like a gleam of enlightenment."

Swiftly Laudin looked up. First there was anger in his eyes. Then his glance betrayed that indecision which is felt when an account must be rendered to someone of whom one is not wholly sure. But at this hour his condition was perhaps such that the character of his hearer was of less significance to him than the offered opportunity for self-examination. There was a need in him, a dark, immeasurable need. And speech, even though it were comprehensible only to himself, might ease that need.

His hands behind his back, he started to pace uninterruptedly to and fro.

46

He did not deny that the question had irritated him. But then it was his mission upon earth to be an answerer of questions. And really it was not May who had asked the question; it was only her voice. It was the world that had put the question, and perhaps One above. He seemed to himself like a man with his back to the wall, whose path was barricaded until he should answer the question. In order to be both clear and exact he would have to go far back into his own past. But he was afraid that that would tire him, and he was very tired in many ways. It was questionable, too, whether his attempt would not wholly fail. Cruel as it may seem, it is nevertheless true that, in the last analysis, men of his kind continue to exist only through a defect of memory, by means of which they are forced to concentrate entirely upon the present, by day or night, in action and in rest. And this excess of awareness of the present reduces the past to ruins. Worse still—it robs the past of its sanctity. He possessed only his present—nothing beyond; he produced

nothing but his present—nothing. Above, below, before, behind, to the right of him, to the left of him—the terrible emptiness of space.

He could not indicate the precise point in time at which there was born in his soul the yearning to be another than himself. The tangible experience was this: Utter satiety of his own character. Of that steely and unchangeable entity which is called character, that state of being so and so, once and for all, unchangeably, without continuity or development. This experience was no doubt connected with his professional occupation, with this activity of a digger of spiritual graves to which his calling forced him. It was only the congealed psychic substance of men that ever came into his hands. And this circumstance had hurled him back into the night of his inner being. His crushed inner man had set up a resistance against this petrification of character, character in the widest sense, and had desired to be transformed. In a dream his own ego had confronted him in the guise of a murderer, and with that murderer he had wrestled for his own life, and chattered with him for the earthly part of him, for this lonely, lost, eternally present part. And then again, when he was awake, that wrestling match had gone on in front of the mirror of all his deeds, and now the prize had been his future self, his re-arisen self, or, if one preferred, a self that was passed and lost. For in the end each man is his own prodigal son, and returns to his father's house when his wings have been broken.

Thus it had been. Laudin, prisoned in his rigidity, unredeemed from himself, met, at the cross-roads of life, Luise Dercum, the eternally changeful, the daily changeable. Here was a miracle of fate. Nothing of settled character was here; everything was fluid and discontinuous, and this seemed to Laudin, by contrast, to tend toward salvation. Since there was no cause here, one could not speak of effect, and since there was no basis one could not speak of continuity. There was only a body. Yet this body even was wholly beyond law.

A soul? Can one call that a soul which flows forth from a thousand souls, like water into a basin, in order suddenly, like the mixture in an alchemist's retort, to form a new supernatural substance? Is there untruth where there has never been truth, where truth is not understood and can therefore never exist? All energies and bloodstreams, all ancestral instincts and obscure natural impulses blend in her fleeting moments of divine self-love and divine self-intoxication to make up a being . . . and yet this being is only image and symbol, eternal liquidity and flux, eternally propagating and changing. Seek to grasp her—she is no longer there. She has neither face nor eye, and exists only within the magic circle of Laudin's money, and disappears into nothingness, into indefinite qualities and desires, when she seeks to descend into life itself. Embrace her; you press a shadow to your breast. Take her to be human, and it is as though you should try to mould water in your hollow hands. Confront her with "yes or no," or with "twice two is four"—words become phantoms and figures empty laughter.

Thus it was that Laudin had met his fate. And that fate was as though it had been thought out, a thousand years ago, by some intensely speculative mind above the spheres, and as though the Parcae had chosen to intertwine threads from the uttermost ends of their spools in order to see how extraordinary a web could be spun, whether for God's sake or for the devil's. It was for him to endure; it was for him to bow down. All he could do was to look upward from time to time and to cry out: "What is it, Lord? Whither am I being led? What is it that Thou desirest of Thy servant?" And that glance was vain, and that cry was vain, because he knew only too well that he and his like had long ago sold the Lord upon whom they called for thirty pieces of silver.

He stood there a few minutes longer, carefully buttoned his long frock-coat, saw the girl's moonstone eyes fixed insistently upon him, took his hat and coat, and left the room without farewell.

47

It was two o'clock in the morning when he got home. He went first into the library, switched on the light, and opened a parcel of books that had been delivered. He looked at the titles of the books one by one, put aside some that he meant to read, and set the others on a shelf. Then, slowly and thoughtfully, he gathered up and threw away the wrapping-paper and the string, fetched a brush and brushed the table, and then proceeded to his bedroom. On the threshold of the room a thought seemed to strike him, and he went back. He sat down on a wooden bench beside the stove and pulled off his boots, which were covered with mud, since he had been walking, not in the city, but the last part of the way home, along wet and muddy roads. Absent-mindedly he took up a book from the library table, and started. The mud from his boots had clung to his hand, and had stained the white cover of the book.

For a long while he stared miserably at the ugly brown stain.

He went into his bedroom in his stockinged feet, drew on his slippers, and washed his hands. In the mirror above the wash-basin he saw his own image, and said aloud, though in a casual tone: "How pale you are, man! Why are you so pale?"

He couldn't make up his mind to undress. First he wandered to and fro; then he suddenly left the room and went over to Pia's bedroom. He remained standing outside the door and listened. He had the door-knob in his hand and did not turn it. He could not know that the woman behind the door was lying with open eyes and that her over-acute hearing had perceived the approach of his muffled steps. He could not know that she was waiting with clenched teeth, her fingers convulsively grasping the coverlet, trembling as grass before it is mown—that she was waiting for the door to open, waiting

as she had never waited in her life before. He could not possibly know that. He was bound to believe that she was asleep. Perhaps he would have felt her waiting, her waiting of long days and of long weeks, now welling up, as it were, growing more and more painful, breaking the shell that had confined it, breaking forth in pain and terror—he might have felt it, if. . . . Yes, if he had not by chance stained the white jacket of that book.

So he went back as he had come.

And out there, on the upper landing, in her white night-dress, erect as a taper, listening as though in a dream, her young soul full of a causeless, foreboding anxiety, stood Relly. Why was she standing there? Why was she waiting there in the middle of the night? What had robbed her of sleep? Or had she too lain sleepless and waited to hear her father's key turn in the lock, and her father's footsteps in the hall below? Why was she standing there in the cold, her eyes big with dread?

Well, that is Relly's secret.

PART III

48

Pia's virginal forehead had lost its clarity. It was like a mirror upon which someone had breathed. Hitherto it had been ageless; now of a sudden it showed the furrows of the years.

Not only was Pia accustomed to silence; not only had she trained herself to be silent; but she did not possess the gift of communication. Readiness of speech had not been granted her. She had words only for facts and the small necessities of life. In the course of time, and with the inevitable recurrence of the same daily duties, these words had become mere things of daily use, and had long ceased to make any demands upon thought or emotion.

And so it came to pass, or so at least it often seemed to her, that all thinking and feeling sank, before her very eyes, into a deep shaft. Above it lay, like a constantly growing pillar of sand, the household, the housekeeping, the kitchen, the needs of each member of the family, the purchases, the keeping of accounts, the periodic cleanings, the questions of education, the assigning of duties to everyone, and consideration as to what was needful for the food, sleep, comfort, and health of all those who dwelt under this roof.

She had no friends. There was no place for friendship in her life. She had never suffered from this want; it had been no active renunciation on her part. Firstly, on account of the natural reserve or, rather, the uncommunicativeness of her character, but also because nothing in the world was of importance to her except her husband and her children. She belonged to them body and soul, and that was as much a matter of course as the fact that her arms and legs should belong to her. Pia, Friedrich, Marlene, Relly and Hubert—

these formed an indivisible unity. On this fact of nature she reflected as little as she reflected about herself.

As she admitted quite calmly, she had no profound emotional relation to her mother. There had never been any open affection between the two. Her mother's interests had always been concentrated upon herself. In the course of the years her lifeless egotism had not only become petrified, but she herself had grown ever more morose and quarrelsome. All the members of the household treated her like a property that must be taken care of, or else like an unavoidable annoyance to be shunned as far as possible.

So the outer world impinged on Pia only in the form of social forces and social duties. She had to receive a good many callers; to return their calls often cost her a violent effort. But Laudin would have taken it ill if she had not done so. He himself rarely went into society; but in the past Pia and he had once a month accepted the invitation of a family with whom they were on terms of friendship. But now these had ceased.

At a still earlier period they, too, had given parties during the autumn and winter, usually on the second Sunday of each month. These evenings had even had a certain reputation on account of the careful choosing of congenial guests and the stimulating character of the talk. It had been something of a distinction to be invited to them. Without any consultation between husband and wife, but doubtless because Laudin did not wish to keep up the habit, these evenings had been discontinued.

He no longer expressed any desire to go to concerts, or the opera, or the theatre with her. He had even gradually given up their walks together, which at one time he had encouraged her to take every Sunday morning, and during which, however the weight of work burdened him, he had always been cheerful and attentive. The hours passed with him in the neighbouring hills and woods belonged to the dearest memo-

ries of her life. She used to walk at his side, listening to him with a smile when he spoke, smiling silently when he was silent. And precisely this stillness of hers seemed to please him, and this quietude of hers to cheer him; and they came home as if there had been an inner understanding between them, although they had talked only of everyday matters.

All this was over. But it was characteristic of Pia that for a long time, during all the long months of the winter, the fact did not reach her consciousness. From one day to the next, perhaps, as she stopped to look back and around, it became clear to her. She understood it, digested it, wondered at it, and began to brood.

She couldn't help noticing that acquaintances whom she met nowadays greeted her more eagerly. Others—for she met many acquaintance from time to time, during her frequent drives to town, and during her errands in the business streets—had a curiously confidential demeanour, and in still others she noted an excessive considerateness, or else a strange curiosity, and even a sort of pity. This gradually made her so nervous that when she saw an acquaintance in the distance she would turn into a side street. One day, for instance, a woman whom she could not avoid had inquired after her husband with an excess of amiable emphasis. She wasn't satisfied with Pia's matter-of-fact account, but asked after him a second time. Another woman, on whom she had to pay a long-delayed call, assumed the air of a sybil, and indulged in obscure and tactless references to that fate which overtook even the most blameless and devoted of wives. Their husbands simply walked over them, not in order to rise to higher regions, but indisputably to sink to a lower level. Pia had looked at her, rather stupidly perhaps, and had begun to discuss the weather. No wonder that in her own social sphere she was regarded as uncultured and somewhat simple-minded. It was for this reason that women forgave her her

charming manners and the youthful freshness of her face. It affected her far more unpleasantly, though she was careful not to betray herself, when an old gentleman, a former Minister of State, who had a private passion for the theatre, informed her with friendly volubility that he had seen Laudin three times at three different performances of the same play. "I don't blame him in the least," he added enthusiastically, "for the play is a real experience, Frau Laudin, quite incomparable, in fact."

Laudin had never mentioned this "experience" to Pia. No doubt it had been an experience to him, too. For what else could have moved him to repeat it three times?

Besides the intangible rumours which fluttered menacingly about her like birds of ill omen, there were the incessant telephonic suggestions of Brigitte Hartmann. Whatever attitude she adopted towards them, and in spite of the corrosive harshness with which Laudin had characterized the woman, these communications left a murky impression behind them. For a while she heard nothing more from the woman. Then, one afternoon in March, she was told on coming home that a lady with two children was waiting for her. When she entered the room the caller rose, made a tentative curtsy, grabbed with each hand one of the boys who had been standing by the window and flattening their noses against the panes, and said: "Allow, me, Frau Laudin, to introduce myself. I am Brigitte Hartmann, and these are my two orphans, I mean half-orphans. I hope I don't disturb you."

Pia was speechless. She couldn't even get out a question concerning the motive of these impudent intruders. She stood stock still, and the half-orphans, who were in their Sunday best, but not properly washed, stared at her open-mouthed.

"Run along into the garden, boys," said Brigitte Hartmann in a fulsomely tender tone to her offspring. "I've got to talk to Frau Laudin; I just wanted her to see you.

You've already seen the lovely garden. Maybe Frau Laudin's little daughters will play with you for a while. She wouldn't object, I'm sure."

The two boys obeyed hesitatingly. One stumbled over the carpet because he couldn't take his eyes off Pia.

"You don't mind if I sit down, Frau Laudin, do you?" Brigitte Hartmann cooed ingratiatingly, and, curiously enough, began to draw on her gloves, which she had laid on the arm of the chair.

At last Pia collected herself. "I don't know of anything, Frau Hartmann, that we could discuss with one another. I think it extraordinary that you should venture. . . . I shall be obliged to inform my husband. . . ."

Brigitte Hartmann raised her arms adjuringly. "Your husband, Frau Laudin, the doctor. . . . Oh, no, you'd better not do that. No, no." She seemed half-frightened at the prospect, and half-malicious. "We've got absolutely no use for him. I am so glad that we're alone. It's about time that we had a mutual explanation. I certainly have got something to explain to you. And even if you're not so mighty well pleased by my visit, which is something that, God help me, even a blind man can see, all I can say is that I can't help it. I'm a person that just can't lie, if I may say so, and if there are lies about, I've got to open my mouth even if it is to speak evil, come what may. That's me."

And thereupon followed, starting so swiftly and swelling so torrentially that no resistance and no warning sound from Pia, rooted to the spot, could restrain it, a perfect lava-stream of words. And such words! To Pia's eyes the room was darkened, and the sky without, and the innermost chambers of her heart. She could not flee. Something stronger than her disgust, than her bodily horror, seemed to have nailed her feet to the floor, and while her cheeks grew paler each second, and her eyes wide and expressionless, Brigitte Hartmann rose again from her chair, and thrust her face close up

to Pia's, and stood there gesticulating and baring the gap in her teeth.

Oh, the doctor could have prevented it easily enough. One kind word and she would have been as silent as the grave. No one in the world stood higher in her estimation than Dr. Laudin. But instead of sticking to her, as she had warned him to do a dozen times, he had driven her to despair. Now he could take the consequences. Even the worm will turn if you tread on it. The whole world, to be sure, had conspired against her. She had started out in life with great hopes. She had had fine ambitions and every reason to expect to realize them. If anyone thought that she didn't have her Schiller and her Goethe in the bookcase at home, or even that poor Lenau, who had had such a sad fate, she could jolly well put them right. She'd never been one given to boasting; modesty was her second nature; she'd rather bite off her own nose than make a show of her education. No, not even for Frau Laudin. Although she wished Frau Laudin to know how she had been treated. A married life to turn a heart of stone. And how she had loved that man! She had anticipated his every wish. People had been astonished. And then that sly Lanz hussy had addled his brains, and he had demanded a divorce! All right, she had said to him; you go your way; I want nothing more to do with you, and I don't need your money either; you can go off with your woman. For she had never doubted that he was going to his death. What else can you expect of such whoring in a man of his years? And that was the way things had happened. Suddenly, however, if you please—Frau Laudin must excuse her for using hard words, but when you torment anyone's soul out of their body you can't expect them to coo like a dove—suddenly that whore and her bastard had turned up and had asked for a will. It's a wonder she hadn't had a stroke. A will? God might strike her dead if ever she'd seen a will! And then the doctor had come along, and had scared her to death, and had asked her, holy Mother of

God, to hand over her personal inheritance. That had given her no rest, nor the evil opinion he had formed of her, and so she had gone to his office and fallen on her knees before him, and had begged and besought him to believe her. He had been deeply moved, and had believed her, and had asked her forgiveness. But that slut of a Lanz woman had conspired with the Dercum woman, and the Dercum woman had raised hell with Dr. Laudin. Naturally, since Dercum had been promised a part of the swag. That had changed everything. The doctor, who had the character of an angel, had become a perfect devil, and she had been pinched and thwacked, so to speak, until she was tired of life. And did Frau Laudin know who that Dercum creature was? Did she know that she was known to all the city as something that she, Brigitte, was too decent to mention? And did she know that Dr. Laudin passed half his nights with that creature? Half his nights in that gambling-hell and grog shop, with play-actors and whores? Oh, she could prove what she was saying. She had waited for him in the street, and had asked him to explain, and had appealed to his conscience, and had reminded him of his wife and his sweet children. It had done no good. He had abused her like an old shoe. And at other times he could be as smooth as butter. He could throw thousands of millions into the maw of that drunken witch—he could, could he? The very market-women were gabbling about it in the streets. To fill the purse of such an actress wench, who devours men as though they were chocolate creams. So it was Frau Hartmann, if you please . . . your humble servant, says I . . . it doesn't mean anything. . . . Please, if you please. . . .

With a hoarse shriek she fell with a thump to the floor. Foam oozed from her mouth. Her limbs twitched. Her body writhed in epileptic contortions. Her flowery hat had slipped over one ear, so that she looked both horrible and ridiculous. And Pia asked herself whether, in spite of its horror, this attack were not the result of dissimulation, although of a

kind which was rooted in an incurable perversion of the mind. Slowly she approached the outstretched figure and knelt and bent over it, and whispered empty, disgusted, and yet compassionate words. But when she made to go out in order to get help, Brigitte Hartmann half rose and groaned: "Do help me up, Frau Laudin. My heart, my God, my heart! Oh, my poor orphans! It's better now. Please to forgive me. Thank you, Frau Laudin. Well, anyhow, I've visited you and seen you. Don't for the saints' sake, take it in ill part. Don't tell the doctor the story, don't. . . ."

With her gloved right hand she brushed her skirt, looked sadly about her, stared at Pia's hands and then into Pia's face, and murmured: "You're a kind lady, Frau Laudin; you're very kind." Then she half-curtisied again and went out. Outside Pia heard her call her boys and then slam the garden gate. She herself sat down quietly in a corner.

Had she really needed the revelations of this deluded creature whose behaviour bore so clear a pathological stamp? Had she needed them in order to see and to know? Although the medium had been so turbid that in passing through it truth turned into falsehood and proof into hallucination, yet Pia's heart was like a sensitive plate which registers and reveals what not the sharpest eye has been able to perceive. Thus it had been superfluous to annoy her with anonymous letters, whether they proceeded from this or from an allied source, like the letter which Laudin had so contemptuously destroyed. It had been as superfluous for the curious to cross-question her as it had been to arouse her suspicions by hints or humiliate her by pity. She had had her forebodings. She had fought against them in vain. Now she knew.

But what would happen if, some fine day, she should find it no longer possible to be content with mere knowledge? She was not clear about that in her mind. She could not be sure beforehand. She was not one of those people who can draw up a programme. She would have to wait until a decision ripened

in her soul. Until then it would be her lot quietly to rule her house, to help her daughters at their tasks so far as she could, to be plagued by all the many things about her, to watch Laudin grow more and more silent and disturbed and restless. Sometimes, quite in secret, hidden even from the watchful eyes of Relly, she would take little Hubert and sorrowfully, with eyes closed, would press him to her bosom. Hubert was now slowly blossoming into humanity. A little while ago he was only a vague creature. Now he was becoming a son. A marvellous word—son.

49

"Kindly sit down, Herr Keller," said Laudin, after the actor had closed the padded office door behind him.

Keller sat down without speaking, with an abrupt gesture of thanks. His figure was thin and badly put together; his head was as narrow as the head of a fish, and his whole face seemed, somehow, to protrude forward in a fashion both ugly and absurd. Even the eyes, with their constantly winking lids, were like protruding lumps. Only the forehead receded, as though alarmed, towards the cranium with its thin reddish hair. Laudin observed at once the shy and suspicious look with which the man glanced about him, and which was doubtless the result of his confinement in an asylum. He seemed to be expecting the appearance, at any moment, of an attendant or an inspecting physician. Apart from this almost touching watchfulness, his bearing was quiet, and had something of that easy, hail-fellow-well-met quality which is common among actors. There was no trace of any real disturbance of his mental equilibrium. The nervous fear in his features was simply the fear that one might consider him unbalanced. Laudin, who was an expert in the psychical treat-

ment of all possible types, adjusted his demeanour accordingly, in the hope of inspiring the man with some degree of confidence.

After an exchange of trivial remarks which did not touch upon the object of his visit, Arnold Keller began to speak with a rattling Berlinesse accent, in a bass voice that had comical breaks in it: "Well, now look here, Doctor; I'm in what you would call a-hell of a fix. Here I've come, and here I am now, and Lu—she's nowhere to be seen. Not that I want to force myself in where I'm not wanted, though, after all, I am her affianced husband. On the other hand, you might say that the way she got rid of me wasn't exactly fair. Anything but fair. They talked me into it, you know. Sanatorium, etc. Abstention from drugs, etc. Well, I won't deny that my nerves were smashed. But it was no sanatorium exactly, take my word for it, Doctor. It was hell, hell if ever there was one. You let them lock you up in a place like that, and I'll bet you my boots against your tie-pin that two hours later you'll begin to wonder if you are crazy. And then you get to a point where you might well say: *et secum petulans amentia cercat*. I say, do you mind if I light up?"

Laudin hastened to offer his cigar-case. The Latin quotation had caused him to look up in surprise. It sounded a little pompous on those lips; at all events one was hardly prepared for it. "I flatter myself, you know, that as far as the old Romans are concerned, I'm a bit of a scholar," the actor continued, with a clownish grimace. "But since I don't want to waste your time unnecessarily, and since brevity is notoriously the soul of wit, I shall be brief. All right. You are Lu's lawyer. I don't envy you your job. Who should know it better than I? Well, to cut it short, will you be so kind as to intercede for me?"

"In what respect? Let me know exactly what you have in mind."

"With pleasure. Or, rather, with no pleasure at all. But

whether with or without, that's what I've come to explain. Let me explain it quietly. *Male cuncta ministrat impetus*, as Quintus Curtius used to say."

He blew his nose, made once more his unspeakably silly grimace, something between a dog showing its teeth and a carp coming up for air, and started off again: "I haven't had the face to see Lu yet. You may well ask the reason. Simple! Her treatment of me was so rotten that it would hardly please her to have me about. Yesterday and the day before I started two or three times. I got to the foot of her stairs. No farther. I just didn't have the pluck to display before her a biped who had been so unjustly treated. That, sir, is a paradox out of Hamlet. Heroic rôles are, as you have already inferred, not in my line. If instead of the torch of Melpomene I had swung a sword in some antique world the Horatian saying *vixere fortes ante Agamemnona* would not have been applicable to me. However, Doctor, I'm no chatter-box. Proof thereof—I plunge into *medias res*. I should be grateful if you'd have the goodness, then, to tell Lu, or to communicate to her, or to assure her—you'll know how—that I don't bear her any grudge, provided that she on her side is willing not to be revenged on me for the dirty, mean trick, the crime—again put it as you like—but by God, it was a crime—which she committed against me. And I would like you to beg her, yes, expressly to request her, or—whatever your dictionary of synonyms suggests—not in future to harangue me or pester me or whatever you choose to call it, any more about a divorce. Because, in short, I can't live without her. That's brief, eh, Doctor? Can't live without her. I'm an artist. Granted. I've got my art. Or my art has me. But think of the saying: *Nulla ars in se versatur*. Can't live without her. That's the briefest form of expression. If you will permit me to use so frivolous an expression in these chambers, dedicated to justice, I'd have to put an end to myself without her. But I tell you this in confidence, Doctor,

man to man. I'm not trying any psychical blackmail. It's a cold, unavoidable, God-damned fact."

Very curiously impressed, Laudin looked into the actor's face with a sudden upward lifting of his own. He saw no real seriousness there. He saw neither jest nor sarcasm; he saw for the third time that clown's grimace which swallowed and concealed all other feelings upon that countenance. But by virtue of his knowledge of the human heart it was clear to him that he was not dealing with the boastful threats or verbal jugglery of a scamp. Through all kinds of undergrowth, through all kinds of intricate shames and self-inhibitions, there came to him something faithful, inevitable, final.

He did not answer; he rested his elbow on the desk and supported his head with his hand, while Arnold Keller continued in his comic bass, and with seeming joviality: "Let me tell you an anecdote, my dear sir. It's to the point. I picked Lu out of the dirt. I dragged her from the gutter, *sit venia verbo*. There's a certain Ernevoldt. He may be a man of genius; he may be a man of character. For years and years he has been claimed to be one or the other, being successful in neither capacity. Well, he's been boasting that he discovered Lu. I haven't any intention of denying that. Only—I'm going to express myself carefully—only, he used his find to get out of it what he could. When he thought, after a while, that there was nothing left to get, he was suddenly nowhere to be seen. He didn't appear again until a few upward steps had been taken. Lu, who has, as you know, no moral sense, and likes to decorate her boudoir with Adonis heads, promptly fell into his arms again, and was happy to have such a handsome fellow to fetch and carry for her. However, to get back to the aforesaid gutter. I won't make the impudent demand upon your imagination to ask you to figure out the particular kind of dung in which Lu was sticking up to her eyes when I gave her a helping hand. I shuddered, myself. She hadn't a stocking on her leg nor a

whole rag to her back, nor bread to eat. She knew no one but a lot of broken-down outcast blackguards, and was bled to the white by a thieving music-hall agent and white slaver in the Ackerstrasse. Have you any idea what that means? I expect you have. Next door to hell. I won't swear she wasn't literally lousy and hadn't the itch. Well, I went down into the muck and fetched the girl out. Was she pale? That's not the word for it. First she had to be fed. Then she had to be clothed. Altogether, it was a sort of a return to humanity. And then first I saw the possibilities of the creature. And then I took her in hand myself. Well, of course, I needn't tell you what I found. The whole world acknowledges her talent to-day. But it was polishing a very rough diamond then, and no mistake. It cost blood and sweat. But it was written in the book of fate that it was to cost even more—more blood, at least. Originally I didn't think that the whole thing would turn out so seriously, that I would, so to speak, get stuck. You see, we actors really feel for each other, let people say what they will about jealousy and envy. I grant all that. No one wants to get his face trodden on, and the footlights are the devil's torches. But if somebody is down and out there are twenty hands stretched out to help him. There are more noble sacrifices among us than among the ladies and gentlemen out in the audience. Unluckily the comradeship between Lu and myself turned into something else. That we got married pretty soon—well, that was like adding salt to butter. I wanted it so. I thought I'd be surer of her. But if I were to tell you the story of that marriage, I'd have to strain your imagination and your credulity even more than I did a while ago. People said it was a farce. Well, it was a pretty sad kind of a farce. Others said it was a tragedy. Especially those who knew me. They had the better scent. Did you ever happen to watch a cat with a mouse, after the mouse's back was broken? She gives it funny little slaps, right and left, cunning, graceful little fillips, doesn't she? And each of these

cunning little slaps brings the poor mouse a little nearer to its end. Well, there you have the funny tragedy or the sad farce. Very effective, I must admit. You'll hardly ask me for details. What good are they? One detail means just nothing. All of them together are the wheel upon which we are broken. I was like the famous fellow who gets lost by night, with his horse, in a swamp. You could hardly call it a marriage. Her bedroom had too many doors. The little men came trooping up as though they had season tickets. You couldn't call it a love-affair either, since we were legally married. So let's call it a marriage plus passion. The most dangerous thing in the world. With all the passion on one side—a hopeless passion, the kind that robs a man of dignity and honour, makes him lower than a dog, turns him into a beggar and a spiritual cripple. Why should I deny it? It happens to be true. And if you ask me: How can a man stand that—day in and day out, the sword of Damocles over his head, and someone else's boots kicking him from behind, and knowing perfectly well that he is being deceived and betrayed and cuckolded and made a fool of—if you ask me that, I'll have to answer you in the words of another quotation. Catullus, Carmen—I forget the number: *Si furtiva dedit nigra munuscula nocte*. You'll understand me. Question of the flesh. You get a little bite now and then. Not enough to satisfy you, enough to keep you tame. Just as the animal-trainers throw the beasts a bite. Or else, sometimes, because things were getting too scandalous. Then out of fear. But even a sheep of a man—well, a day comes when he gets wild and rages. And for that reason, and because I was a bit superfluous anyhow, my salary being no longer needed, this business of the asylum was started. A sly business. And a damned low business, too. Once I was inside the place, violence was no good, prayers and tears were no good. I'd be there to-day, if a Red newspaper hadn't taken up my case for all it was worth. And so I'm here. Not to protect my rights, as people

are so fond of saying. For God's sake, what are rights or, if you come to that, right? All I'm after is a sort of peace pact, and you needn't be afraid that I will insist on any fourteen points, which, like the famous fourteen points, would go up in smoke. I make one point only. All I want is to ask Lu to put up with me. Not necessarily to have me around all the time. Just, somehow . . . put up with me. She need not live with me. Just let her leave things as they are. Let her give me ten days a year—no, say a week. You make her understand that, Doctor. Seven days in the year! Not, perhaps, seven nights. I haven't the cheek for that. Only to come to her and be with her and see and hear her. Don't despise me as a lost soul, my dear sir, now that you've had the patience to listen to me. Consider—it's like a poison that's in the blood. Look at me. I'm a wreck. One week a year, Doctor. Make Lu see that, any way you can. Tell her it's a question of life and death. What does a week a year matter to her? Do you mind if I light another? Thank you."

Laudin stared at the table. After a while he began to cough. There was a lump in his throat that seemed to interfere with his breathing. He got up and went over to the table and poured out water from a decanter and drank two glassfuls greedily, as though he had burnt his tongue. His pupils were slightly enlarged, his lids slightly swollen, and his jaw quivered. He looked around him, as though the walls annoyed him, and said at last: "I suppose you know that she is going on tour for a week, to-night?"

"I'll wait till the end of the week. That's nothing. Sort of reprieve."

Laudin nodded. "To-day is the 23rd of March," said he, looking at his notebook. "Will you be here on the 2nd of April at five o'clock in the afternoon?"

Keller got up. "So I can hope that you will. . . ."

"I will make an effort," said Laudin in a gloomy tone. "I cannot tell with what measure of success. The risk is

great. The very discussion of the question is a daring thing."

"Certainly, I understand. But I have great confidence in you, Doctor. My address, if you should happen to need it, is the Three Ravens hotel." He took his felt hat and the yellow gloves which he had put on the brim of the hat, and bowed very low, and went out.

50

Let us linger a little longer in this *camera obscura* of life and we shall see a woman enter, a suppressed creature, about forty years of age, well but unobtrusively dressed. And she, too, tells Laudin her story, and this story, added to what he has just heard from the actor, makes the thought upon his forehead almost a vocal thing: it is too much; it can no longer be borne.

The woman's name was Annette Gmelius. For eighteen years she had been married to a merchant who was three years her junior. There had been no issue. She had been undeviatingly faithful to her husband, although he had turned from her to other women, even in the early years of their marriage. But his ways had always been secret ways. She had to sense it each time, then to guess at the signs; then, when the matter could be no longer hidden, there had been an explanation and he had been crushed and contrite, and had begged for her forgiveness, and at the end of some weeks or months the same process had started all over again. Gradually, as one can readily imagine, she had grown very weary, and had given up hope and had resigned herself to losing him. She could not say that he had utterly neglected her. A wife is still good enough for one single thing. The man doesn't mind taking his pleasure; but he never thinks

of hers. He pays no attention to the fact that the wife just endures it and feels humiliated, and that her kindness turns into indifference and the indifference at last becomes disgust. But why should he care? One woman is like any other woman. The only point is that it is always another woman, and ultimately one's wife is convenient. And so gradually she had become utterly discouraged. Discouraged was the word: nothing gave her pleasure any longer, and she had forgotten how to laugh. Well, and then one day he had brought up the subject of divorce. She had told him at once that she would never consent. She hadn't looked for any reasons, but had simply given him to understand—no, never, under no circumstances. But why? Why this refusal which looked so unreasonable, and which, as she herself sees, can lead to nothing but endless contention and bitterness? Because, she says, men get things too cheaply in this world. He can start life over again; hers is over. Nothing has happened to him; for so many years he has had an obedient housekeeper and bedfellow. Now, at thirty-six or -seven, he is as good as he was at twenty. She, on the other hand, is weary and worn out. She has nothing more to expect from life; she has no spirit left, and is only fit to hide herself somewhere and lie down to die. That is why a woman wants a little moral satisfaction and clings to her poor feeling of power and defiance. He made several attempts to change her mind. Then he gave it up and seemed to resign himself, too. One day he brought home with him a young employee of his firm, a handsome, cheery fellow. The three conversed together very agreeably. She didn't dislike the young man, and felt that she had made a pleasant impression on him too. Soon she had proof of this. He sent her flowers and wrote her affectionate little notes, and while Gmelius was out of town he came to her with theatre tickets. They went together to the theatre and to supper afterwards, and they did this again the next day, and the next. It seemed to her as though her youth had

reawakened; her happiness was almost painful; she had not believed that she was still capable of such feelings. She had felt as though all the ice about her was melting, and when the young man had grown more and more urgent and passionate, she had thought: Ah, once more in life I, too, shall drink the cup of life; it was only a little thing compared to what her husband had done to her. And she gave herself to her friend. And then it appeared that the whole thing had been a shameful plot. The young man, black to the very heart, had given a previously concerted signal. Her husband was at the door. Everything had been arranged. Nor was that all. The fellow had been in her husband's pay. He had been bought in order to be caught with the woman *in flagrante delicto*, so that a divorce might be obtained. Yes, the husband had bought the fellow for the purpose. Now she was the guilty party and would get neither settlement nor alimony.

"That's the way I've been treated," the woman ended her story, "and now I want to know whether I must just suffer what has been done to me, and if there is nothing that I can do about it."

"Unprecedented," Laudin murmured. "Unprecedented."

"Yes, unprecedented," said the woman bitterly. "But as you see, one can do things that have no precedent."

He dismissed her with the assurance that he would take up her case. But when she had gone he no longer merely thought, but spoke the words: "It is too much, too much; it is scarcely to be endured any longer."

Since May had sent him word that she was confined to her bed, he went to see her on the following day. His mind felt

numb, and his body like the body of one who has had a bad fall.

Just as he arrived, six or seven people, men and women, were leaving the room. Among them were an old man, an elderly lady, and two very young men. He could not help remarking a certain peace and cheer and clarity in their faces. There was something innocent in their bearing, and they spoke to one another in soft and gentle tones as though they feared the wounding quality of loud words. A middle-aged man with a long brown beard and spectacles had a face of child-like purity, an unburdened face. Involuntarily Laudin stopped and looked at the man in amazement.

These were friends of May's; these were the illuminati.

He sat beside May's bed and asked: "How does one gain admission to your community?"

"One must share the faith," she answered.

"What faith?"

"Faith in the eternal, indestructible Being."

"In God, you mean?"

"The concept of God is too deeply implicated at present with the existing religions. But we have nothing to do with any of these, for we have neither dogmas, nor articles of belief, nor a church. We perceive Being only by introspection and meditation."

"Yes, but how does one acquire the faith?"

"By renunciation, by chastity and patience."

"And do all these men and women live in a state of chastity?"

"Yes, all."

He looked at her. A blush spread over her usually pale face. She spoke hesitatingly: "When an elemental power thrusts us down into the state of imperfection, the power of our longing grows proportionately. The hostile principle can work in the soul like an electric storm."

"There is a good deal of pious hypocrisy in all that,"

Laudin answered. "There are many things that we make clear to ourselves only because we wish to be armed against the voice of conscience; or against the voice of the blood."

With a wandering glance, May said: "I often think of you as though you were an omniscient healer. And at such times I could wish to be wholly in your hands."

Sadly Laudin shook his head. For a while there was silence.

"For a long time past I've wanted to tell you about Edmond," May said. "All the more because I can't feel quite sure that I may not perhaps have been to some extent guilty of the collapse of his married life. Of course, the idea of guilt ought really to be excluded. The marriage was rotten to the core. He knew that; she did not. In the beginning I even tried to uphold their common life. I had a pious dread of coming between two people united in wedlock. For me it was something inviolable. And Edmond, too, when I first knew him, regarded marriage as a sacrament. Not on religious or ecclesiastical grounds, but in consequence of his general outlook. Then, too, he clung to the children. I have rarely seen a man who took his duties as a father so seriously. But beyond this feeling of duty there was the tenderest affection. He told me how, when the children were very young, he used to go and look at them in their beds once or twice during the night. He could not sleep unless he did this. He had a great reverence for childhood; in reality he was always in fear for his children. Now, a very curious thing seems to have happened. Constance became infected with this fear. But because she is a thoroughly rationalistic creature, this fear in her became transformed into delusion and superstition. Instead of bowing down before the unfathomable, she wanted to prevent its decrees, and had a panacea for every mortal ill, until finally she became a prey to the most dangerous quackeries."

"But that is only one of the many symptoms of decadence in which this marriage was so rich," Laudin interpolated.

"As I think about this marriage more and more, and hear your account, I am forced to the conclusion that it was almost in the nature of a paradigm. Here, in the germ, and demonstrated in the persons of two typical persons, we have all that so urgently needs to be juridically established."

"You are right," May replied. "There was, above all, one thing of which Edmond used to speak. He used to say: The whole problem of marriage is a question of tempo. A great part of his misery arose from a difference in tempo. This started with the commonplaces of every day, with the keeping of engagements and the punctual appearance of dinner on the table. It extended to things—well, to those things between two people of which they alone have knowledge. It is implicated, don't you think, in the very question of keeping step with each other in the street. I have made the observation that if two people walk at the same tempo, the better and the quicker walker gets tired first. The other, if he can't insist on his own tempo, takes refuge in his weakness, and lags behind, injured, and rests. But the weariness of the one who walks quickly is a weariness of the spirit. And one day he discovers that he has not only walked faster, but that he has fled in order not to be lamed by the deadly tempo of that other whom he was forced to leave behind. That sounds quite trivial, but is, in fact, very important. Edmond had thought about it so intensely that he could discuss it for hours. Now it was the fate of Constance that in all such matters she suspected his good will, as though he could have acted differently, but had simply made up his mind to victimize her. She persuaded herself more and more stubbornly that she was being sacrificed to him. The real truth was that she oppressed him daily more and more by an arrogant passion for mastery which must, I should think, be unexampled. I must explain that to you, because it is highly remarkable. I've thought a good deal about Constance. I wanted to understand her, because I wanted to help Edmond. Nothing caused

him acuter suffering than the fact that his imagination was constantly absorbed by her, and that he could never quite get free of her. This was truer of the shadow that she cast than of herself. She knew her power over him and made every possible use of it. You will say that he was weak-willed. It isn't so. I could tell you of incidents that might make you call him cowardly. That wasn't true, either. Every marriage is determined, it seems to me, by the rigidity of the direction pursued by one of the two people. The stronger of the two is he who can develop some quality, a good or an evil one, to such a point that by virtue of this quality he forces upon the other a relation of guilt. I don't know if I make myself clear. Now Constance is extraordinarily passionate; passionate to the point of savagery and self-forgetfulness. From the very first day, not consciously, of course—she is what she is—she tried to fill Edmond with the fantastic conviction that she existed only through him, and that they were bound to each other by a decree of fate. A strange kind of love, a kind of possession in both senses. To be sure, she always knew what she was doing. You should have heard her when she said: *My husband. My!* It all lay in that word. As though she had devoured him. But that had not been Edmond's intention when he married her. It was not so that he had wished to plan his life. He found himself suddenly trapped and surprised into this situation, and it was years before he was clearly conscious of the fact. What he needed by his side was a free human being, and one to whom the things of the mind were realities and not merely a showy pretence. Thus he was gradually strangled by her declaration of unconditional dependence. It was a most curious as well as a most dangerous distortion of the concept of possession, by which he came to feel that he was just a piece of property, and was so, in fact. You understand what inevitable defeat there arose from this situation, what restlessness, what flight and inner conflict, especially as in Constance emotion and calculation, ecstasy

and rationality were so inextricably intertwined. She had him in her power; she controlled him, so to speak, from a distance; even when he resisted, out of a clearer insight, and in his longing for liberty and movement. It was like a spiritual imprisonment, and it was only very gradually that he attempted to break the spell. The things that I have seen! Sometimes he would come, utterly distressed, as though he had been literally flayed. The useless words that he had been forced to utter clung to him like thorns. I know that he has stood beside the bed all night, trying to console her, to strengthen her, to soothe her, to teach her. Until dawn he would labour to restore the relations between her and himself, between her and mankind, between him and his friends—to repair all that in her despair and bitterness she had destroyed. But since the occasions were always of the most pitiful triviality, incredible and indescribable—a misplaced letter, a stain on the carpet, a misunderstood word—neither of them knew how deep the thing went. Nor did they want to see it. Not he, in his dreadful enslavement, his fear of losing his daughters, his natural disinclination to make decisions that would revolutionize his life; above all, in his compassion for her and her unhappy nature. And she would not see, on account of the very delusion of her frightful suffering. For she, too, must have suffered. Terribly. She didn't make herself; she came into being like the rest of us and was forced to act and love according to what seemed to her the inner law of her being. And Edmond knew and recognized this, and that recognition was another chain about him."

Laudin sat there as though he had heard nothing, with an expression of profound abstraction. After a silence so long as to become almost painful, he recovered himself with a start, and said: "I shall always remember one remark of your dead friend's, that the institution of marriage is no longer productive, no longer capable of life. Every day I am more convinced of the truth of that remark. When I see what

people do to one another I feel that anarchy would be better, or chaos; better nothing than this. Away with it! We must begin all over again. Only let us do away with this lie, this evil caricature, this universal shame. This unhallowed mixture of compulsion and revolt, of public morality and vice, which in a more modest age was secret, but which is now absolutely public. It makes people evil; it makes them day by day more stubborn and mean."

He had spoken quite calmly, in a strangely dreamy tone, with folded hands. May drew herself up, startled, opening wide her veiled moonstone eyes: "But are people to live together like animals?"

"I confess," Laudin replied, "that it costs me a definite effort to imagine that they are doing anything else at present. I cannot grant you the analogy at all without degrading the animals beneath their proper level. For even the lowest species do not live otherwise than according to the wise laws that nature prescribes."

"But what you have just expressed is not a view that can be discussed; it is really an outburst of despair."

"It may be, dear May, it may be."

"A man like yourself can hardly be satisfied with such a statement. Have you any vision of what might be?"

Laudin leaned far forward. "What I have in mind," he replied, still in the same dreamy tone, "what I seem to see is like a great liberation of slaves. There must be something like a year of jubilee for the execution of all laws concerning these matters; there must be the complete nullification of such laws. Then, at the end of a decade or two, one should let laws develop anew. I say develop; they mustn't be manufactured laws. That is to say, a council of the best and profoundest and most far-seeing spirits of all nations must tentatively formulate them anew, in strict accordance with the actual facts of contemporary experience and under the guidance of genuine moral insight. Have you ever heard of

the so-called Siberian system of marriage? In that country it is customary for a man and a woman to unite themselves by an act of free choice and free decision without the blessings of the Church or the approval of the authorities. In the deprecating word forced upon us by the guardians of our morality, it is a kind of concubinage. Surprisingly enough, experience has proved that such unions are not only far more lasting than those that have the guardianship of State and Church, but that the two partners whose remaining together depends on nothing but their will, have shown, in the majority of cases, even among people of the humblest kind, a remarkable degree of mutual consideration and kindness. But I have yet another vision. . . ."

He waited for a moment, and passed his hand over his forehead, and continued: "I have a vision of something like the transformation or rebuilding of the whole social ideal. It is a thought with which I have wrestled often and which has always returned to me in many forms. The central point of all our thinking and action is always the I, always the self. We are drowning in self-assertion and self-consciousness. We are concerned over the extinction of the I or its separation into its component parts, or its deliquescence and re-formation. If an individual is dissatisfied with the form of his existence, he will seek a new one, a more joyous one, one that is more in conformity with his needs. I can no longer resist the conviction that the individual personality, in consequence of the modern over-emphasis of the ego, and especially since Christianity has ceased to function effectively, has lost its significance. We must prepare a new soil from which new creatures are to grow. I find that the individual is no longer important to society, in so far as we are dealing with society's spiritual and moral state. Only the couple is important. I am thoroughly persuaded that for each man and each woman there exists but a single possible complementary personality. It surpasses all imagination what human society would gain in peace, in

delight, in elasticity, in purity and cleanliness, by the constant increase of such truly constituted pairs. And it is for this reason that I want all barriers to choice to fall. Neither men nor women must be hindered in their choice. No moral odium, no burden of paternity, neither motherhood nor premiums on virtue, must prevent them from testing and experiencing all the forms and even the fancies of love that they either desire or imagine. If they possess any true instinct, that instinct will be sharpened; if they have the will to community it will lead them to a goal. And be that goal what it may, it must *not* be what is now called marriage. Nor should we be concerned over a possible dissolution of morals and a so-called lapse into savagery. Nothing more evil is conceivable than that which now weighs on our hearts and darkens our spirits. No price is too high to pay for the mere attempt at transformation. In every human being, even in the most apparently lawless, there is a natural inclination toward some sort of equilibrium. It is this inclination which will, in the end, conquer all temporary and dangerous forms of eccentricity. It is a mere hysterical convulsion that ties our present world to laws and customs which were once significant and necessary, but which to-day have left behind them only the empty forms. The abolition of capital punishment decreases the number of murders. Crimes create criminals; penalties create criminals. There is something wonderful in the spirit of man—an inextinguishable longing to trust the good that is in it, even if of that good there is but the tiniest seed." He got up with a sigh. "What is the use? What is the use? These are mere bubbles, empty dreams."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not wholly," said May thoughtfully. "Perhaps this thought is slumbering in many souls. Perhaps it needs only to be expressed and proclaimed. . . ."

"Experience has taught me that whatever is expressed and proclaimed loses its significance two days later. It becomes a theory, and when the theory has been sufficiently babbled

about people regard it as a commonplace, and practice remains untouched."

"The twofold human being . . ." May murmured. "It has an exalted sound, but will it bear the test of reality? The birth of every child alters the obligations which two people sustain to one another. Does not the child withdraw the mother from the father? I have seen the happiest marriages, and when once the children came, everything became grey and difficult. Women can do little to sustain the level of happiness; it is not in their hands. It is in the hands of the men, at least up to a certain point, but they are not careful enough. Either a poor little child is born each year, which makes the battle of life more cruel, and is driven like another wedge to separate the twin souls of the parents, or else they must resort to the method of killing the germinating life. Now that is what most people do. It has become so common that no one remarks on it any more, but what is the real outlook of such a marriage? So much mysterious guilt has coagulated; no wonder that the two people involved become sharply hostile to each other without knowing the reason why. One sees women who have grown ugly from sheer sadness, just because of this; but they themselves have no notion of the true reason. They are tormented, and do not know of what they have been guilty, and what they have permitted to be done to them. But what are they to do? Are they to bear a child every fourteen months? And what is society to do with all these children, considering that even now there are far too many people in the world? And such is the reality with which we have to deal."

"We mustn't make reality the measure of our possibilities or there would be no progress at all," said Laudin wearily.

May looked at him attentively, and then said hesitantly: "And if this vision that you have, this dream, this phantasm . . . if there is reality in it. . . . I mean to say, if this notion of a twofold being, of the sole possible completion . . .

if this, for instance, were to be applied to yourself, applied to what you hinted to me the other day . . . you remember. . . ."

Laudin interrupted her with a hasty and commanding wave of the hand. His face grew pale. "Not that," he said harshly. "No concrete examples, no applications of theory. At least, not in this case. I beg of you; I beg of you. . . ." With lowered eyes he gave her his hand in farewell. He felt suddenly sorry for the abashed girl, and forced himself to smile agreeably and to mention, quite by the way, the talk that he had had with Keller in his office. He added that he would tell her more about the matter soon.

"I'm afraid that some misfortune will happen," May said.

"Yes. The end will be tragic for one of the two," he replied, and walked out with a heavy tread.

52

When he was out in the street, with his foot on the running-board of his car, he seemed to have the impulse to turn back once more. Had he forgotten something? It almost seemed so. Perhaps he had wanted to ask May one other question: "What did you mean the other day when you said: 'And do you think that that is all?'"

On that evening he had interrupted her. Not only that. He had fled with the panic haste of a man who finds himself on a railway track in the darkness and sees fifty yards ahead of him the approaching headlights of the locomotive of an express train. He had not wanted to hear or to know or to understand. But that was not his way. And so it had happened that the panic had worked on in his brain, and he would start up out of his sleep with wretched eyes and look about him and hesitatingly ask himself: What more? What more, if that was not all? That he received no answer when

he asked this was his only consolation, the only thing that still left him the possibility of any sleep.

But this, too, was not Laudin's way. Yet one might well ask what there was left of his admirable and much-admired ways of old? He had once been warm-hearted, and scrupulous in respect of his obligations, and true to his promises. Would he, in those days, have found it possible to avoid his friend for weeks and to leave him without news—that lonely man out there in his suburb, in the fourth story of that huge barracks, mourning for a shade and yet pretending to the icy mien of the stoic? It was as though he feared that friend's face as much as he feared the answer to the question: What then, if that is not all?

He had tried several times to write to Fraundorfer. The written word can convey more meanings than the word spoken face to face, with its betrayal through expression, glance and tone. The written word may be more broad and general, and may be weighed and studied before it is set down. Hence he had written something like this: Egid Fraundorfer must take into consideration not only his professional preoccupations but also a certain intellectual numbness that had come over him recently; he begged him to believe, etc., etc., and that at the very earliest opportunity he would, etc. As an excuse this sounded rather inadequate; so he tried to write in a different vein, saying that he was ready to admit the erroneous nature of his original assumptions; the intervention of unsuspected circumstances had given a new aspect to the whole sad business. But his judgment could not yet be final, and he therefore asked his friend to have patience. But neither of these letters had been sent. They lay in his brief-bag, and gradually there came over the writer a painful reluctance to open the brief-bag. Now what do you do with a brief-bag the very sight of which is a reproach and an annoyance? You lock it in a drawer and let the dust gather upon it.

But you cannot do the same thing with the image of a living

man. It was perhaps in order to evade that image and to satisfy its silent demand by some visible act that on more days than one Laudin set out in the direction of his friend's house. And once he got as far as the door of the house. But he turned back. He walked down the street with a look of horror. No doubt he was horrified—horrified by that stairway, by the thought of climbing up the old, cold, desolate stairs, by the walls with their cracked stucco, by the window in the fourth floor, which was open, so that one could hear from the depths and the circumference of the courtyard the chattering of the maid-servants, the clashing of dishes, and the running of water. Just so had it been on that day when he had stood beside the dead youth and asked aloud: "Why?"

Yes, and having gone upstairs he would have to ring the bell. Then, black and thin, Frau Blum would have appeared and begun her discreetly indiscreet whispering. An odour of burnt fat would have come from the kitchen; the heavy, exhausted air would have crept out of the living-rooms, and all the objects in those rooms would have leaped forward, reproachful and demanding, toward him, the caller and procrastinator. No, the horror was too great.

If only things were different at home! Not that horror met him there. Home was still something of a refuge, and a place of well-prepared peace. But it held something akin to horror, something that flickered over it like an obscure, equivocal twilight. It was the same light that might occasionally be seen in the eyes of Luise Dercum, when the golden-brown tones that gave them life and fire were extinguished, and there rose out of the depths a pale, yellowish, exhausted light, like the light one sees when one dreams that one is under water, and the sunlight is refracted into a spectral web.

There was Marlene with her radiant activity; but turned away from him. She seemed to have said to herself: We had better dismiss father from our thoughts for a while. There was something almost hostile, something almost defiantly

superior in her cheerful way of talking to indifferent persons. She seemed to be saying: I don't need you, in spite of all her courtesy to him; but this courtesy had no eyes for him.

And there was Relly, vigilant and earnest, quick and reliable. She would notice at once if there were no salt on the table; she would flit out and return with the salt-cellar in the twinkling of an eye. But why did she look at him so searchingly? Is putting the salt-cellar on the table a proper occasion for such searching glances? He asked her what she wanted. No, nothing. And her voice was full of sincere surprise. But behind that there was an embarrassment, a repression, an unchanged, never-to-be-silenced question.

How the child was growing up! It seemed to him that he could see her daily increasing in stature. Marlene told an anecdote of how, in her bath, she would put her feet close together, so that the toes stood in a row, and would say profoundly: "Of course ten *must* be more than twice five!" But already in her body and her limbs you could see the woman growing out of the child; her brows were quivering with the foreboding restlessness of sex.

That is what is dangerous about these beings: this becoming, this approach to maturity, this growing into selves and personalities. Soon the mighty paw of fate will hurl them into the ranks of the finished, the completed, the lost. Such oppressive thoughts did not trouble him when he held little Hubert in his arms; then the doors of the world were closed; here was the entrance to a fairy kingdom, where laughter and tears dwell as close together as the fingers of a hand, and where caresses are like the magic potions that bring forgetfulness. It was so pleasant to touch the child's bare flesh; his whole body was like a strangely warm jewel, a precious stone come to life, and he could hardly bear to believe that this was a form of the same strong, permanent, self-determining life that dwelt in him and in other men and women. Confronted with the child, both father and

mother play a rôle of singular impotence. They try to mould a substance and to form a spirit that obeys alien and as yet unfathomed laws. And when the day comes on which substance and spirit begin to yield to their moulding hand, then perhaps the mystery that has its origin in the innocence of the primeval world has already been rubbed off.

Laudin expressed these thoughts to Pia. She listened and seemed not to understand. Perhaps she was thinking of a torn curtain-string. The gardener's little daughter had broken one of the terrace windows by an unlucky throw of her ball. Perhaps Pia was thinking of that. Into Laudin's words there crept a weary tone. Pia got up and busied herself about the room. But her gestures still seemed to be about him, and in her clear, light voice she said something that was meant to encourage him to go on, but which had no connection with the thoughts he had expressed. She was evidently absent-minded. "Did you put rouge on your cheeks, Pia?" Laudin asked her with a smile at once shy and surprised, as he came nearer to her. "Do you notice it for the first time?" she answered, also smiling, but withdrawing herself strangely. "I've been doing it for some time; I don't want to look so faded in the morning." Everything about her withdrew itself from him—her hands and her eyes. But she herself seemed not to know it. She avoided touching him. She no longer leaned against his shoulder when, on a Sunday morning, they went over the weekly bills together. And her face, when she turned away from him, was different from the face that she showed him. But he paid no attention. Even when she stood with her back to him you could see in that back something of discomfort, of resistance, of an impulse toward flight. But he paid no attention. He had no notion of the effort with which she restrained herself, no notion of what it cost her to greet him so amiably. And, of course, he could not see that a shadow came over her face when she closed behind her the door of the room in which he was.

To him she was an accustomed phenomenon. All in life that is custom, that is the regular recurrence of the same things, was for him embodied in her. It had come to be utterly a matter of course for her to be there, for her to come and go. He knew how she would sit down and how she would get up, and how she would turn her head to one side when she said certain things, and what words she would use by preference. He knew her way of thinking and of drawing inferences, her simple, never deeply searching, but perfectly correct judgments of people; and at the beginning of every conversation with her, he knew how it would end. He knew her words, her smile, her attentively watchful look. He knew all these things in her; not only at any given time; he thought he knew them for all time to come. The possibility of a transformation in her did not lie within the range of his imagination.

Now, as always, he was courteous and chivalrous in his treatment of her. But into the old and practiced forms there had stolen something that was at once strained and mechanical. One no longer knew precisely what his manner concealed. At moments it seemed like a varnish that was showing cracks. He even displayed a certain objective respect toward his desk, his cigar-case, and his paper-knife, and there were moments in which he seemed to lose all sense of the difference between people and things. Presiding at the table with his amiable dignity, he would suddenly sink into a silence which all could feel like a leaden weight. His forehead would become clouded, his lips compressed under his thick moustache, his eyes fixed, his bearing exhausted. Marlene and Relly did not dare to talk of the Easter trip which they had been planning for a long while, and to which they were eagerly looking forward. Their father had recently expressed himself in very strong terms about the increasing expenses of the household. Once, when speaking of this matter, his expression had given them a moment of intense dread. He had presented

the picture of a man who looks desperately about him to see whether there is no escape from the whip that is lashing his shoulders. Perhaps this was only an obscure reminiscence of the simile of the draught ox which he had once employed when speaking to Fraundorfer.

But all this while he had a feeling as though Pia were pursuing him; not pursuing him in reality, but as though in spirit. He didn't try to account to himself for this feeling, and denied himself any test of the fact; he simply suffered the exacerbating sensation. It seemed to him as though Pia had multiplied herself; that she was walking behind him, now in this disguise, now in that. Her great, gray, silent eyes seemed to be constantly upon him, and they seemed to penetrate to the very bottom of his soul. He defended himself, shut himself in, fled, hid. But there was no escape. She was forever there—in the office, in the theatre, in the car, in court, during conferences, during his waking hours, in his sleep, his dreams. Constantly that wide, silent, passionately serious glance searched his soul. That was why he lowered his lids so shyly whenever the real Pia stood or sat before him. That is why his features were convulsed with a pain from which, he believed, he would one day have to liberate himself with a great cry, a helpless and embittered and tormented cry: "Woman, let me be!"

One stormy night, four days after his last conversation with May, he came home late. Until midnight he had worked all alone in his office. Then he had gone to a little suburban café, and had sat brooding there for an hour and a half. When he opened the door of his bedroom he saw a figure rise up in the darkness and disappear in silent haste through the door that led to the library. Obviously she had been sitting at the table, so lost in her thoughts that she had not heard his step in the hall. He switched on the lights. But of that form, which could have been the form of no one but Pia, no more was to be seen or heard

He remained standing by the door for a little while. Then hesitatingly, with lowered head, he passed on through the dark library and through two other dark rooms to Pia's bedroom. He knocked softly. There was no answer. He touched the door-handle. The door was locked from within.

53

Very pale, he went back into the library and switched on the lights. He sat down at his desk and supported his head on his hand precisely as he had done in that little suburban café. After a while he looked up. In the street, immediately under his windows, he heard footsteps pacing regularly up and down. First he thought that it was the policeman on his beat. But since the footsteps never went beyond the house, hardly beyond the light of his windows, he rose, and pulled the curtain aside, and looked out. At that very moment the nocturnal wanderer stopped and looked up. He could be easily recognized by the light of the lantern at the gate of the little front-garden. It was Egyd Fraundorfer. On his head was the well-known slouch hat with the enormous brim; a cigar smouldered in the corner of his mouth; below, close to the gigantic feet, like a tiny white shadow, hovered Herr Schmidt.

In nervous haste Laudin opened the window. "Is it you, Egyd?"

"The same. Who would it be?" croaked the nocturnal wanderer's voice, made rough and hoarse by drinking and smoking.

"So late. . . . What has happened? And why do you walk up and down in the street?"

"It's hard to get into a house at two o'clock in the morning without being considered a suspicious fool, and cursed as

such by all the inhabitants of the house. I was taking a little walk in order that Herr Schmidt might get a breath of air. And somehow or other I drifted into your neighbourhood. It's quite a distance, I know, but after all one has one's thoughts on the way. And when I saw the light in your room I thought it would not be amiss to recall myself to your memory."

"Won't you come in?"

"If it doesn't incommode you . . . it's worth considering. The rest of this night isn't good for much, anyhow. Come on, Herr Schmidt. Make up your mind."

Softly Laudin went down and opened the door and the gate. He led Fraundorfer in, asking him by a gesture to preserve an equal silence. He did not relieve him of his coat and stick and hat until they had reached the library. The storm had violently closed the window, and now tore it open again. Laudin latched it securely. Then he said to Fraundorfer that he could only offer him cognac, if he would be satisfied with that.

"'Only' is good," Fraundorfer chortled, deep in a corner of the sofa. He had assigned Herr Schmidt a place beside his thigh.

Laudin brought out the brandy-bottle and filled a glass. "What are you doing with yourself nowadays? How are you getting on?" he asked with enforced naturalness.

"What am I doing with myself?" Fraundorfer said, and scratched his head. "Honestly, I don't know. How am I to know? Yesterday a gentleman came to see me, a publisher. He had heard that I am writing a book. Wanted it. Offered very decent terms. But he talked and talked until my gorge rose, and at last I said to him: 'You've been here for quite a while now, my dear sir; you might just as well go home now.' He got up red with anger, and jumped up and roared: 'The devil, Doctor; people are quite correct; you're not in your right mind.' There you are. There you have the world's

opinion of me. In the last analysis, perhaps my own also." He leaned back, stared at the ceiling and twiddled his thumbs.

Since Laudin did not answer, he said after a long period of twiddling: "Excellent. Let us be silent. Until a really significant thought occurs to either of us, we shall be silent. Only proper solution of the problem." His voice sounded hard and almost contemptuous. After a while he threw his cigar-end on the carpet and began softly to hum to himself and to beat time against the table-leg with the tip of his boot.

Laudin picked up the cigar-end and threw it into the stove. Still bending over, and gazing into the black hollow of the stove, as though the words he must speak were written there, he said: "I think I may assume, Egyd, that neither chance nor accident has brought you here. I am sure I am not deceived if I assume an intention. I won't go into that. The hour is strangely chosen. You could hardly count on finding me awake, still less on finding me prepared for conversation. I am tired. I am tired out. If I haven't gone to bed it's for the simple reason that I'm too tired. Also that I'm afraid of sleep, for my sleep is a caricature of real sleep. But since you are here now, Egyd, I regard it as a sort of providential arrangement. And, so that you may be informed once and for all, I am going to try to tell you the sheer truth about my situation."

"Speak, son of Themis," said Fraundorfer drily, and made as though to suppress a yawn.

Laudin stood up. He went to the door that led to the corridor, opened it softly and listened for a moment, then he went to the door of the adjoining room and did the same thing. Thereupon he returned to the stove, and sat down on the carved wooden bench, and said: "Since I last saw you things have occurred that blocked my path to you. My way to you would, in any event, have been a difficult one and, since I could not bring you the information you were justified in expecting of me, a way of humiliation, too.

It would have been humiliating because, not suddenly, but very gradually, I gained an insight which taught me that I had been utterly wrong. Yet on the other hand I had neither the courage nor the strength to communicate to you the knowledge born of this insight. In the meantime I have been caught in a most lamentable web. I have . . . well, I abstain from all attempts to make the thing seem better—I've lost my self-respect. Ah, if it were only that! I'm afraid it's more. I'm afraid I've lost my self. You smile strangely. I know you think that that is precisely what I wanted and strove for. No, my dear friend; to lose my self? No. Unluckily to lose one's self or to throw it away does not mean to exchange it for another and a higher self; it means an impoverishment that surpasses all imagination and all belief. And it means more than that. It is as though with your right hand you were to grasp your left, and with your left hand your right, and to try to tear your own arms out of their sockets. And this is only one phenomenon. I could not save myself from that woman. Without a doubt you estimated the situation correctly from the very first. I was deluded and wished to be so. I shall omit the painful causes. For I am not now concerned with an analysis of my life, of the way I have been crushed between the two mill-wheels of justice and society. That would lead me too far. There came a point when I became the victim of this woman, when I had to become her victim. With horror I now recognize that it is a passion of the most fatal sort imaginable. I have degraded myself. I have polluted myself. I have become involved in affairs, the very mention of which would once have made me blush. I am defending causes and carrying on litigation of such a sort that in hours of self-recollection I am tempted to flee across the ocean and bury myself in some lonely island. It has come to such a pass that I am forced to let the most disreputable members of my profession address me with an insolence that makes my heart turn to ice and poisons every mouthful of food. I associate

with people whom only luck or superior impudence has kept out of gaol, and respectfully press their hands. I have sunk to be the errand-boy of loose women and the supporter of more than questionable enterprises. I have become an object of scorn to my employees and of pity to my former friends. I fear the looks of my daughters, tremble at every gesture of my wife, and am a stranger in my own house. I know it and I cannot change it. As things are now, I could become a criminal for the sake of a smile from Lu. When she comes from the stage, clothed in the flame of her genius; when the pain or joy of her voice has stricken me to the heart, and the truth of her impersonation has melted me wholly—at such moments I forget what she is or is not, what she really plans and executes, and the whole world seems to me like a fabric of silver. It is a fascination. That is the word one uses when one can find no other. But I have never yet touched a finger of her hand save in reverence. The notion of asking for her favours, of a physical relationship. . . . I don't know that I've ever entertained it. That thought has something dreadful to me, like the end of all things, a kind of death yet unrecorded, the overthrow of all the elements of life. Laugh at me if you like. I, too, could laugh if I were not afraid that my laughter would turn into something more questionable. For one thing I am bound to add. My eyes are open. There are no longer any coloured veils before my eyes. Truth and innocence—ah, yes, let us laugh, by all means, if we feel a tickling in our throats. In spite of all? But is it right to say: in spite of all? Let me say rather: for that very reason. Have you never, when someone has lied to you and deceived you steadily and uninterruptedly—have you never had the feeling that you must go to him and open his bosom and at last drag out the truth? Have you never felt the impulse, the fearful impulse, to follow that degraded creature in order to subdue and convert him until he ceases to follow evil and becomes transformed? That too is a fasci-

nation, and it is perhaps the most incurable of all fascinations, because nature itself denies us the means of its cure."

He stopped, and rose, breathing deeply. Then he sat down again and pressed his hands to his eyes.

"H'm!" said Fraundorfer, and then no more for a long time.

Then he rose heavily, drew on his cloak, snuffing, put on his slouch hat, and grasped his cane.

"Are you going?" Laudin asked in a toneless voice.

"It's past three o'clock," said Fraundorfer.

"I don't blame you for feeling that you've heard enough," the same toneless voice replied.

Fraundorfer leaned with both hands on his stick and hunched his back. "We might some day try another bit on the horse," he croaked. "I mean, as regards a cure. After all, the question is how far this dismal sort of fascination—as you choose to call it—is consistent with a completer knowledge of your mistake."

"What are you driving at?"

"Several weeks ago one of your colleagues came to see me. A man named Heimeran, or something like that. A very vain fellow. Have you nothing in your shop but tailor's dummies? Anyhow, he called my attention to Weitbrecht. On account of Nicolas."

"Weitbrecht——?"

"Of course, you know Weitbrecht? Naturally. Yes, that's the man. Nicolas had been to see him. Two days . . . before. Don't you understand yet?"

"Nothing. Or do you mean to say that . . .?"

"What else should I mean——"

". . . to tell me that . . .?"

The voices clashed like swords.

"Hold fast to one thing, oh incorruptible son of Themis, namely this: at the beginning of August, Nicolas confessed to me—a remarkable enough confession for his years and

station—that he had hitherto never touched a woman. One night he came home later than was his custom. I don't remember what devil got hold of me that night, or what had crazed my brain. At all events, I trotted over and delivered myself of a little fatherly sermon. Discoursed on hygiene and the dangers to which, under given circumstances, a young man might be subjected. I was quite informal, quite comradely. He was lying in bed and reading, leaning on his elbow. I can see him now. He looked up and considered me a bit ironically, and blushed, and said, word for word: 'For the present you haven't any reason to worry about me, father; I am still as I was on the day of my confirmation.' I stood there open-mouthed, the picture of a fool, and trotted off again. Do I have to speak more plainly to make you comprehend——?"

Laudin's face looked like the face of a corpse. Only very slowly, sound by sound, he seemed to grasp what he had heard. Then he drew himself up. He smiled a strangely arrogant smile and said in an icy tone: "For the sake of our old friendship you will permit me to disregard this monstrous thing. I can't consent to take note of it. I still feel that I owe a remnant of respect and faith to the humanity within me. I have gone far enough by revealing to you what I have revealed. I cannot follow you into the morass of unproved slanders. It is the instinct of self-preservation. I assume, of course, that you are the credulous victim of evil tongues."

Fraundorfer, still leaning on his cane and bending forwards, his massive body swaying a little, looked at him with a gloomy and malicious curiosity. "Very well," he said. "Assume what you like. Assume it for the present. Till the moment of retraction. We'll agree on that. Herr Schmidt knows that I am not opposed to the notion of retraction. I wish merely to add one thing. I have not, up to date, called on Professor Weitbrecht. Why? Well, there is such a thing as the irrevocable. And up to now I've stood in some awe

of that. Now, however, I'll have to drag myself to the man's office. Perhaps not at once. Perhaps not to-morrow. To do to-morrow what you have determined on to-day is a species of pedantry. But perhaps in three or in four days' time. Possibly to-morrow, after all. Who knows? But when once I have been there, my friend, and when the die has fallen, and we find that here we are dealing with no slanderous gossip, but with an irrevocable fact, then . . . well, perhaps in that case I, too, will create another irrevocable fact. Good night. I'm sorry for you, Dyskolos. Let us go, Herr Schmidt!"

He turned. Silently Laudin accompanied him to the door.

54

Next morning Pia did not appear at the breakfast-table. The maid said that she had had breakfast with the two young ladies and was accompanying them part of their way to school.

It was radiant spring weather, and Laudin was not surprised. But just as he rose to go, Pia entered the room. "Can you spare me five minutes, Friedrich?" she asked him cheerfully.

"Certainly, my dear," he answered, and sat down again.

She sat down opposite him and folded her arms on the table.

Then she leaned slightly forward and said in the same cheerful tone: "I should like to propose to you, my dear, that you move into town for a while. Under the circumstances, I believe it is the right thing for you to do. For your own sake and for ours; I mean for mine and the children's. There are no difficulties at all. We'll tell people that professional affairs compel you to live nearer to the office. The daily drives, especially so late at night, are too much for you. I've already solved the problem of where you are going to

live. I talked over the telephone this morning with Frau von Damrosch. She's a sensible and very worthy old lady, and her late husband was very fond of you. She always remembers that. She has room and to spare in her large flat, and will be delighted to have you stay with her. What do you think, Friedrich? You could move over this very day. I'll pack all your things, of course, and this evening you could simply go to your new quarters. Wouldn't that be best?"

She looked at him with an encouraging smile. Nothing in her face revealed any emotion except sincere care for his comfort, eagerness to serve him, and the desire to make her words seem quite unemphatic, the natural result of a practical exigency. Nevertheless, Laudin, who could not at once answer, and felt indeed as though the room were turning round him, perceived something new in her face, something that aroused both amazement and consternation in him, namely, an absolute, unbreakable determination. He took up his napkin, rolled it up, put it back into the silver napkin-ring, and tried in vain to find words.

"This arrangement is only for the present, of course," Pia continued. "Later, we'll have to see what seems best and agree on that. But just now it seems the simplest and most sensible thing to do. Don't you think so?"

Laudin swallowed a couple of times, picked up a few crumbs of bread that had fallen from the napkin to his knee, and replied: "I think you're right, Pia. Since you regard this step as a necessity and as easier for me, I have no doubt that it's the proper thing to do. I have no objection to make. I shall do exactly as you think fit."

This was the reply that Pia had evidently expected. She nodded. "There's one thing more," she said, and blushed slightly, a thing which annoyed her and made her turn aside as though vexed with herself. "I wanted to tell you, Friedrich, that you are not to consider me in any way. You are free. You are a perfectly free man. As far as I am concerned, I

make no claim upon you, not the very slightest. Act as seems best to you, and you can be sure that you will have my consent in all things, the gravest and the least. We needn't waste words over that. Don't worry about me. Do what you must; I have confidence in your judgment. You are free."

Before Laudin could answer, even if it had been possible for him to find an answer, she had risen and had left the room with a friendly nod.

He sat there for a while lost in reflection. Then he drove to town.

That afternoon he paid a call on Frau von Damrosch. The slightly deaf old lady of seventy had the pleasant manner and the bearing of a vanished age. Laudin remembered her husband, who had been president of the court of appeal.

The large trunk containing his things was already in the rooms assigned to him. "So that is Pia," he murmured, with an expression of utter amazement.

When he returned to his office he found Luise Dercum waiting for him.

55

She had not gone into the waiting-room. When Ruediger had informed her that he was momentarily expecting Laudin, she had simply walked into the private office without noticing the consternation of the old attendant. She was walking impatiently up and down.

"You here, Lu?" Laudin cried in surprise. He went towards her with outstretched hands.

Yes. She had returned three days earlier than she had planned. She had simply broken off the tour. There had been nothing but annoyance and vexation. And then she hadn't been in the right mood. Her playing had been rotten. She had got into a regular mess. First she meant to wire

him; then she thought she had better come herself. The producer and the agents were raving, of course. Let them. It was so funny to see the asses rave. It brought out their asininity. The trouble? A question of money—as usual, of money. She had to have four hundred millions by seven o'clock that evening.

Her pose was disdainful as she leaned against the side of a bookcase. The fingers of her right hand played nervously with a bracelet on her left wrist. As always, when she talked about money, a change came over her eyes. The golden brown shimmer turned greenish. The swiftly changing expression of her features, changing from passionate irritation to watchful calm, from dissembling tamelessness to utter submission, was extended to her whole body—a rustling of her gown, a sudden twist of her shoulder, a lightning turn, a quick tapping of her toes. All was in uninterrupted movement, running through every limb, and then to restrain movement was delightful.

"Why do you need so considerable a sum at such short notice?" Laudin asked slowly.

Why! Why! That's just the way with fixes! They are adventure and danger. A fortnight ago she had bought an emerald necklace of a jeweller named Esslinger. She hadn't paid for it. Just before her tour she had needed money to satisfy some other bloodhound. So she had pawned the necklace. She didn't know how the devil such a thing could have happened, but Esslinger had got wind of the transaction and had the cheek to wire that if he didn't get the money or the jewels by a certain hour, he would have her arrested for fraud and obtaining goods under false pretences. Imagine! Imagine Luise Dercum arrested! "Now you see, dear friend, why I have to have the money."

Laudin turned pale. He sat down and stared at the floor.

She drew near him. Suddenly she sobbed. She pressed her cheek against his hair and her whole body quivered.

"Am I not Laudin's Lu, and can't I turn to you when the whole world grows dark about me?" she cried with the grief of a beaten child, and clung with both hands to his shoulder.

Am I not Laudin's Lu! Who could have withstood that! And her tears, and the grieved quivering of her slender, boyish body; her melting in shame and indignation and remorse; the marvellous beseeching of her eloquent hands! What was there here that was not real, that was artifice or untruth, hypocrisy or studied gesture? Am I not Laudin's Lu? And that voice—the very soul of music. As though, in the midst of a terrifying dream, a coloured fountain rose into the air.

Laudin took her hand and pressed it passionately to his lips. He looked up at her as to a being immeasurably far above him. He said, almost with fear: "It is impossible to get the cash to-day, Lu. The banks close at four. It is too late."

"Oh, but you can go to Esslinger and give him your note," said Lu. "Laudin's note is all that is needed."

He was startled. "That's even more impossible, Lu. I can't personally be mixed up in such a case. . . . I risk too much. You must understand that."

Lu compressed her lips. "I understand," she said frostily, and drew herself up. "Professional standing. High reputation. I understand. Then I must just see where I can get help." She shrugged her shoulders and picked up her coat.

One moment," said Laudin, rising. "I have not refused to help you. Some way out can be found, though I do not deny that the matter embarrasses me extremely. But first of all there is something else that must be settled between us."

Lu looked at him with cold suspense.

He continued: "Once before, on a similar occasion, I tried to obtain a service from you in return. A painful precedent. It looks a little like vulgar bargaining. What I want to-day is

not, as it was then, a mere piece of evidence, to use the legal term—a piece of evidence, by the way, which you contrived to withhold from me. I am concerned with a living human being to-day, with the life of an unhappy man which has become dependent upon your decision. This consideration forces me to disregard the painful nature of my request. . . .”

“Well? What? What is it?” Lu asked impatiently, wrinkling her brows.

“Arnold Keller has been here to see me, Lu.”

“Ah,” she said and threw back her head. Her face grew hard.

“If, in return for some not quite unimportant services which I was able to render you, dear Lu, and for others that I still hope to render you——”

“Not another word!” she interrupted him. “I know all about that. I know what the unappetizing creature wants. The fool has been bombarding me with letters for a week. If you come to me with that proposal, Doctor, we have nothing more to say to one another.”

Calmly and firmly Laudin replied: “I repeat that it is a question of a human life. What he told me impressed me as wholly sincere. It moved me, Lu, as few things have ever . . .”

Lu’s face was distorted with disgust. “Your feeling of solidarity with that lousy rotter hardly redounds to your credit,” she said contemptuously. “Enough of him and his kind. I wouldn’t have him touch the tips of my fingers. Spare your breath.”

“I have promised him, have pledged myself that I would plead his cause,” said Laudin, in whose voice and bearing were the integrity and loyalty of twenty years of service to men and causes. “You must not crush him.”

“And why not? What else should one do with a reptile?”

“However annoying his very existence may seem to you, however worthy of your hate, he is a human being. It is

a human life, and you have not the right to destroy the life of a human being."

She burst out laughing. "Oh, really?" she asked, and looked curiously at Laudin with challenging and sparkling eyes. "But suppose I take that right, in spite of what you say?"

"The man asks nothing but a little toleration," Laudin continued insistently. "How did he put it . . . what can a week—a year matter to her? He would be satisfied to crouch on your threshold like a dog. It is a fixed idea, a sad and unnatural one, senseless and undignified; true, true! But who among us has not at one time or another identified his very salvation with a fixed idea? Have pity, Lu! Pity on yourself as well. Don't assume the burden of this responsibility. The man means what he says. Make peace with him; you are in his debt. If I am to believe that I mean anything to you, that you feel the slightest friendship toward me, do not let me have spoken in vain." He attempted a kindly and beseeching smile, and the very attempt gave proof of his unfathomable enchantment. The smile faded even as it was born, for Lu, stretching forth her neck and head with the movement of a panther, could not wait to answer him.

"Do you imagine that his life means anything to me?" she asked in evil triumph. "Or that any man's life means anything to me? Not that much!" She snapped her fingers. "Not that much!"

And now came a spate of words from a mouth that seemed to mangle those words because for once he could not understand her. There broke forth the concentrated savagery of years. It was a mixture of the coarse and vulgar with the absurd and spontaneous; in the midst of brilliant acting there resounded an outcry that seemed to come from the depths of the people.

Laudin wrestled with this unchained element. The feeling of his own powerlessness did not prevent him from trying

to dam and restrain it. Nor did his feeling of admiration, as at the eruption of a volcano, keep him from a stirring of shame at the spectacle of this excess. He wrestled with her by expression and gesture and looks and broken words of adoration. He fought for a life—for the life of a human being who was a stranger to him, but whose advocate he had consented to be, and in so doing he looked as though he were a stranger to himself, as though he were standing upon some hallucinatory stage and playing a pantomimic figure in a drama, of which only this scene was given him to know.

It is difficult, if not indeed impossible, to fathom why Luise Dercum lost all form and self-control at this precise moment, and over just this matter, which was probably one of complete indifference to her. Perhaps it was a mere whim. Perhaps the impulse came from some experience that had nothing to do with the matter in hand. Or it was the mere necessity of hearing and seeing herself, or the temptation to mystify another, or the delight which she sometimes seemed to take in tarnishing the surface of her being and making it opaque. The occasion might have been something either extremely complicated or extremely primitive. She was certainly risking a great deal, for, in a sense, she was overstepping the natural limitations of her talent. Her strength lay in the moving, melting, dreamily soulful and idyllic, and, on the other hand, in defiant, agile, sparkling, boyish energy. That was her range, and it did not include storming and raving passion. But, after all, such creatures are unaccountable and inscrutable. They will sometimes risk forgoing an obvious advantage in order to test the sensually intoxicating power by which they feel themselves borne upwards.

It was pity that Laudin demanded? Her experiences had drained her of that. She had no place left for pity. She had given her youth and the bloom of her beauty. She had paid with both. Men! Ha, she knew them! She had run the whole

gauntlet, and was stripped of all illusions. She had never known her father (this was a new version of her past!); she had never had any brothers (this was new, too); she was willing to except half a dozen friends, although, Heaven knows, they weren't always the rare birds that they gave themselves out to be. But the others! She knew the faces and the lures and the baits and the fairy-tales and the masks; she knew the grocers and princes, stockbrokers and generals, Ministers of State and wine-merchants' travellers, officials and parsons, writers and diplomats, dancers and professors. She knew the respectable, the coarse, the subtle, the pious; the idealists, the hypocrites, the swindlers, the perverse; the misers, the spendthrifts, the dandies; the fathers of families and the green youngsters, the lambs and the wolves. Why shouldn't she know them all? They swarmed about her like roaches. Some pretend to high character. They haven't any. Others pretend to the fires of genius. They're the funniest. Even if the humour is unconscious. Some swear that they will die of love. Take them at their word and they pretend to be deaf. A few really die. They cause the most trouble. And they're not worth it. For of what value is a life that is thrown away like an old boot, simply because a woman won't submit to their will? And you can buy them all with counterfeit coin, with a barefaced little pretence of delight—a pretence so crude that you would be astonished, if you weren't secretly horrified. Looking back upon her life, she knew that she stood there with empty hands. They had stolen the soul out of her body and had disappeared. A woman like herself can never become a mother; the earth beneath her is rotten to the core. She has no faculty for respect left; men have alienated her from mankind. She sometimes seems to herself like a wild animal whose retreat the beaters have cut off. To break that fatal chain she must show off the tricks she has learned. She recalled a night in Posen. It was during the war. The officers at the front were starved in every respect. A crowd of half-

drunken fools stormed her rooms and forced her out of bed. She had scarcely time to slip on a few rags. Amid shouts and cries they dragged her to the so-called Grand Hotel. She had to sit with them and show off her tricks before them till early morning. And they fairly raved because she didn't want to yield herself to them, and tossed down at their feet the heaps of paper money which they offered her. There had been gipsy music, and a few wretched Polish Jewesses had danced the dance of their despair for these coarse louts. Did Laudin want to know more? She could tell him; he could have all the anecdotes he wanted. Did he expect her to be frightened if one of this eternal crowd of hunters, who has accidentally succeeded in binding her to the stake of marriage—if a creature like that comes along with a tearful rigmarole, and demands his so-called rights, and thinks he's a fine fellow for not asking to share her bed as well as her board? Is she expected to shed tears over that? She would not give up a single night for ten such lives as his! A week? Seven days can seem like seven centuries. One can die of disgust in seven days. To her time was neither long nor short; only full or empty. There is time in which she blossoms and time in which she withers. She throws her heart into the seconds, and that is her eternity. She is like that; that's the way she is made; no one knows it or has discovered it, and that one thing in her which no one has yet possessed she would not sell at any price, however high.—That's all she has to say. Except good-bye.

During her last words she had slipped into her coat with the agility of a lizard. Before Laudin could stop her she was gone.

It was an incomparable exit. On the stairs she drew herself up and breathed deeply and smiled over her own deliciousness, and as though she were wondering: what will he do now?

Then she went immediately to the jeweller, Esslinger,

whom she persuaded without any particular trouble to grant her two more days in consideration of her assurances in regard to Doctor Laudin.

56

Ten minutes after she had left, Laudin also left his office. He drove to the bank. It was closed for business. He sent in his name to the secretary of the board of directors and asked whether there was any possibility of his still drawing out four hundred millions. His request was regretfully refused. He knew that he had not so much ready cash, and asked to be shown a list of his securities. When he looked up the rates of that day, it was clear to him that he could sell none of his holdings without considerable loss. He hesitated to give any order to sell, and said that he would ring them up next morning when the stock-exchange opened. Since he couldn't have the cash to-day, it didn't matter at what hour to-morrow it was available. But his expression showed that he really felt that he must have it to-day, and was determined to get it, too. He drove to an acquaintance of his who had a private bank in the Ringstrasse. The office was still open, but the man himself had left. When Laudin, however, assured the clerk that he must see the banker on a matter that admitted of no delay, telephone calls were sent out in all directions. Laudin waited, constantly rubbing his fingers with the palm of his hand as though they were benumbed, and gnawing at his lips. Finally the banker came, and took Laudin into his private office. He, too, sincerely regretted his inability to oblige Laudin. Large sums had been paid out that day; there wasn't so much money left in the strong-room; next morning Laudin could have any amount he desired.

Again he threw himself into his car and drove back to his

office. His face was like wax, and his eyes had a feverish gleam. He had evidently lost all inner freedom and all power of reflection. The strange circumstance that, considering his means, he couldn't in an urgent situation get hold of a sum of money which he needed at a certain hour—this circumstance was tinged by danger, and seemed like a foolish and evil dream. "I'll have to go to the jeweller, after all," he murmured to himself as he entered his private office. But this seemed to him a desperate step. His whole appearance showed how he fought against it. Suddenly, he struck his hand against his forehead. He unlocked his safe. At eleven o'clock that morning a client, a wealthy manufacturer whom he was representing in a case brought by the fiscal authorities, had deposited six hundred millions with the firm. Laudin had intended to ask Dr. Kappusch to take charge of the money and to turn it over to the proper authorities. He had forgotten to do so. It still lay there. His hands trembled as he took out the packages of bank-notes. His hands trembled, because he felt himself guilty of a fraudulent action. Perhaps at this moment he was not conscious of the fact that he could replace the money almost at once, and that he was merely exchanging things wholly identical. But his very gesture seemed criminal to him. This money, which had been entrusted to him, precisely because it had been entrusted to him, seemed to him alien money. It did not matter that he could replace it in the morning. The night that must pass before the deed could be undone was a night without honour, a night of crime. Under the pressure from without and the shattered disarray of his imagination, his emotions produced only melodramatic visions, and only a dim light proceeded from his intellect.

He locked the safe. He dropped the keys twice. He had taken off neither his hat nor his coat, and he left the room as soon as he had gathered the money and slipped it into his brief-bag. Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when there

came to meet him the form of a woman with arms upraised, whom Ruediger was trying to hold back by the sleeve. He started backwards, quivering, as though he were still in that disintegrated, dimly lit world of the imagination. The woman was as pale as death, and her eyes were almost extinguished with grief. "Doctor," she stammered, "for the sake of God and of his Son!" And Laudin said: "Who are you and what do you want? I have absolutely no time. . . ." And the woman, with those beseeching uplifted arms: "Doctor, something unspeakable has happened; my brother. . . ." And still more harshly, Laudin: "But you hear that I haven't a moment to spare." And then the swaying figure said: "I am Caroline Lanz." With both hands Laudin waved her aside. "To-morrow!" he cried to her, and left her behind.

But his eyes could not help remembering that pallid, grief-stricken face.

He ordered his chauffeur to drive to Luise.

It was seven o'clock when he rang the bell. The maid—it was no longer the maid to whom he had given money the other day—said that her mistress could not receive anyone. She had to be at the theatre in fifteen minutes, and she was now dressing. Laudin said that he would wait until she had finished dressing. With a good deal of assurance the maid objected that her mistress never received anyone just before going to the theatre. Laudin insisted that he would wait in spite of that, and went into the studio.

The maid shrugged her shoulders and closed the door. He walked up and down with long strides. Now and again he glanced about him, like the criminal and cheat, already pursued by justice, that in his distempered imagination he felt himself to be. After a while he heard a whispering and a rustling of petticoats. Next he heard the outer door slam. He waited a few seconds longer, and since all was silent he went out. A faint fragrance of perfume was perceptible in the anteroom—Lu's perfume. The silent maid appeared. With a shrug of

the shoulders, as one who should say: "I have done my duty," she announced that her mistress had just left the house.

Slowly, and clinging to the barister as though he were dizzy, he descended the stairs. He stood undecided by the door of the house, his brief-bag under his arm, and looked wretchedly about him. Again a vision of that grief-stricken face came to him. He shook his head a little, and looked in another direction, away from that vision. Perhaps he had the feeling that the brief-bag under his left arm was beginning to burn, for he shifted it hastily to the other side. He saw the astonished look of his chauffeur. He pulled himself together and ordered the man to drive to the theatre.

When he left the car he glanced for a moment at the play bill posted up at the stage door. In a moment he had forgotten the name of the play. What he did know was that, in this particular play, Lu was "on" up to the last curtain.

He walked up and down in the stone corridor that led to the dressing-rooms. Scene-shifters in blue smocks met him and passed him. From below he heard roars of command. Two firemen were conversing sleepily. Several young girls, quarrelling or loudly laughing, came down the stairs.

The period within which Lu, according to her own statement, had to have the money had elapsed. Undoubtedly Laudin was aware of this fact. No practical good could be done by handing her the four hundred millions that evening. He might just as well wait until the next day. Then he could easily raise the money and send Lu a cheque. It was wholly unnecessary for him to march up and down here in this dim theatre corridor, with a brief-bag full of money. But he obviously could not endure the thought of Lu's believing that he had left her in the lurch. Since, in a moment of unforgettable self-revelation, when she had permitted him to look into her innermost being—as he still firmly believed—she had renounced his help, it seemed to him his nearest and most urgent duty to convince her of his devotion and desire

to help, and to sweep aside all hindrances in her service. The money in the brief-bag—a little mountain of banknotes—was the visible proof of this; visible and tangible. That he was so sure of this fact, and relied upon it so completely, pointed to an instinctive understanding of the actress's nature which would perhaps have startled him, had it been wholly clear in his mind. To see and actually feel a desired object—that is the irresistible lure which conquers the pride not of harlots alone.

Through an iron door that had been left ajar he heard applause that lasted for minutes. It sounded like a landslide of stones in a quarry. The act was evidently at an end. He stood still and considered. He said to himself: I will wait till the end of the next act. He went out into the street and sat down on a bench near the stage door. Half an hour passed. He got up again and walked several times round the whole theatre. A newsboy offered him the evening paper. He bought a copy and thrust it into his pocket. Then he returned to the corridor. But this time he went as far as the dressing-rooms. He knew which was Lu's, and paced up and down in front of the door. The wardrobe woman, who knew him, an elderly woman in a little white cap, came out of the door that gave on the stage and looked at him with a question in her eyes. He said that he had a very important message for Fräulein Dercum, not an unpleasant one, he added with an almost servile smile, when he saw the woman's ambiguous expression. All the subordinates here were, of course, perfectly well aware of the peculiarities of the star, and the necessity of indulging them. The woman offered him a chair and he thanked her and sat down. He moved his lips as though he had a bitter taste in his mouth. The completest stranger could have seen that he was tormented to the point of physical pain by the sense of his humiliation.

He took out the evening paper. The first thing he saw was a heavy headline: "Student arrested for counterfeiting." He

read the name of Konrad Lanz. He let the paper drop and pressed his left hand to his eyes. Once more he saw that pallid, grief-stricken face. For a while he was too overcome to read. Then he ran through the article, which told of the affair in considerable detail.

The authorities had been aware that for some months past counterfeit banknotes of the half-million denomination had been issued at regular intervals, from a definite part of the city. A thorough investigation had been instituted; all suspicions had converged upon a single point, and to-day it had been possible to arrest the counterfeiter in the person of the student of chemistry, Konrad Lanz. For years the young man had been living in a poverty-stricken garret; he had always led a reserved and simple life, and was very well thought of by his neighbours on account of his modesty and industry. Originally he had occupied the two-roomed flat alone. Since the autumn, however, he had been joined by his sister and the latter's illegitimate child. He had supported them both on his earnings, which had recently increased by his criminal activities; formerly he had, with some difficulty, made a living by tutorial work. Inquiries made at the university and the laboratory among his professors and fellow-students had elicited a most favourable account of him. His life had been blameless, his scientific gifts were highly praised; he had already published several papers in technical journals, which had attracted the attention of the experts. In scientific circles there had even been a rumour that he was on the point of an epoch-making discovery of the highest practical value for the industry and economic life of the country. These facts seemed to render the error which had now delivered him into the hands of justice all the more incomprehensible.

The report stated, further, that the counterfeited notes had been made by means of the most primitive technical and lithographic equipment, in spite of which they were of such extraordinary precision and exactness that in a number

of cases it was difficult to tell them from genuine banknotes. The most curious circumstance of all was that although Konrad Lanz, in view of the relative perfection of his notes, could have made enormous profits, and robbed the State of vast sums of money, he had limited himself strictly to the spending of three of these notes per month, which was as much as he needed, observing the greatest economy, for the support of himself and his dependants, and the pursuit of his studies for his degree. From all this it was evident that he was not tempted by the desire for wealth and ease; he simply wanted to keep his head above water. His first confession substantiated all these facts. After a youth of the bitterest need, he wanted only to obtain a position worthy of his abilities and to forget this criminal episode in his career. That he had, in fact, withstood any impulse to utilize his criminal skill to any dangerous extent could already be proved with some certainty from the circumstance that his sister, who was utterly devoted to him, and had trembled for him, had spent the nights which he needed for the manufacture of the counterfeit notes at his side, and had kept an account of everything they spent, to the fraction of a crown. Hence she had been permitted to remain at liberty.

With brow so contracted that three deep furrows spread across his forehead, Laudin stared into emptiness. Then, almost mechanically, he read the whole account through once more, word for word. But there was at this moment something mechanical in his movements and in his bearing. It became more and more emphasized, as though he were thinking and acting in a diminished or fitful state of consciousness, and were able to react only to certain external impressions, or to decisions already in the past. The brief-bag lay upon his knees; it seemed gradually to grow heavier. He regarded it with absent-minded awe, with a kind of fear; it might have been a block of granite that had been rolled over him; he looked at it as though the leather were transparent and the

packages of banknotes something to strike terror to the heart. Is it possible that he was thinking of the want of the student Lanz, of those long years of pain in head and heart, of the vain struggle of worthy and ambitious plans and thoughts? And was he comparing all that with that heap of money on his knees, which he had brought with magical swiftness for the satisfaction of a woman's fleeting lusts? Did he think these things out? Or did they only hectically and elusively flicker through his disordered imagination?

Once more the applause, long and roaring, came to his ears. Figures rushed in from the stage. "Curtain!" someone cried. Painted faces and many-coloured garments appeared and disappeared and reappeared. Laughter and chatter, and commands and upbraiding voices. Bass and tenor and falsetto voices. Suddenly, Lu stood before him. In her eyes was an expression of strangely equivocal curiosity. Was she nodding to him? He looked up sharply. He rose. He bowed. He said something hoarsely, with an expression of exaggerated courtesy. "Curtain!" someone roared again. Lu disappeared. He was still standing there with that courteous expression. It was clear, now, that only a mechanical principle still guided his actions. Lu came back, rushed to her dressing-room, called out a name, put forth her head again, and nodded to Laudin. She did not smile; she was almost contemptuous; in her eyes there was a certain fleeting scorn, something dubious and lustful, but quite without vulgar sensual significance. The brown, mobile, bold, boyish face was hardly recognizable under the mask of rouge and powder and the outlandish wig. "Ah, you bring me what you promised me, Doctor," she said, in a rather metallic voice and with a superficial, curiously ambiguous politeness, while she signed to her dresser, who evidently stood behind her, to be silent. "But I can't do a thing with it here, most excellent friend. What do you expect me to do with it here?" She laughed excitedly, and the intoxication of the stage seemed to quiver through her whole

being; a meretricious, almost insane fire. "You want to come in here with me? (Laudin hadn't indicated any such desire.) No, that absolutely can't be done. But you really are an angel, Doctor, an angel in human form. Ah, there's Ortelli!" She pointed to the elegant advertising-manager with his obsequious smile, who now entered the small, crowded room. "Max, you'll have the goodness to take the brief-bag and wait here till we're ready to go home. Do you hear me? And you, dear Doctor, you must come to see me to-night. I shall expect you. By the way, why are you so pale? I don't approve of that at all. One moment, please; just one."

Swiftly she ran back into her dressing-room, came back as swiftly with a pot of rouge in her hand, dipped her fingers into it, and, before Laudin could resist, painted two red spots upon his cheeks, laughing heartily. "Now be sure to come, Doctor," she said ingratiatingly. "Any time after ten-thirty." She slammed the door of her dressing-room.

Laudin stood by that door. Mechanically he had handed over the brief-bag to the obsequiously smiling Ortelli.

A seething emotion of such immeasurable shame flooded him, he felt himself so stained, so utterly bespattered, that he would have made any conceivable sacrifice of comfort, of possessions, of life itself, if he could have summoned a miracle to make him invisible at this moment.

At the same time he knew with a dark fatalism that he would obey the woman's summons. He knew it as surely as though her wish or her command had been burnt into his brain. With unsteady step he emerged from that stony tunnel of a corridor. In the street once more, he looked up at the dull redness of the sky—this veiled city sky of embattled chimney-stacks and unclean passions. Astonished, hesitating, incredulous, he asked himself: "I?"

It was not until twelve-thirty that he rang the bell at Luise's door.

He had driven to his office, sent the chauffeur home, and gone into his private room and lain in the dark, on the leather sofa, for three long hours, like a felled tree. He had neither felt nor thought nor seen. It seemed to him that he lay at the bottom of the sea in a dark-green, soundless dusk. Fishes swam about him; fishes of every conceivable kind and form; pair by pair they swam by him; their aspect was morose and stupid and threatening; the whole of space up to the very surface of the waters was filled with these pairs of fishes; far below their scaly bodies showed glowing colours, purple, blue, red and yellow; nearer the surface the colours grew pale, and those that were highest and farthest away were of transparent white. But in the direction whither this vast and winding shoal was swimming there was a huge open mouth, the jaws of a sea-monster. Thither they swam unsuspectingly, and the insatiable mouth swallowed them, while above, far from all danger, the glassy white fish disported themselves.

When he got up and consulted his watch he started like a soldier who has missed his roll-call. Nevertheless, and although it had begun to rain, he went through the streets on foot.

Even in the anteroom he heard the deafening noise of a large party. He stood there pale and undecided. He was impelled to count the coats and hats which hung on the hooks, and to count them over and over again. Then May came into the anteroom. She nodded in surprise at Laudin and started looking for her coat. She had the air of a fugitive. "I'm going home," she said; "it's quite too . . . too repulsive. . . . I can't stand any more . . . and you've come so late. . . ."

Laudin looked at her as though he were searching in his memory for something that had to do with her. Immensely

relieved, he said at last: "Ah, yes, my dear May, to-morrow we have the first session in the case of Altacher. We shall hardly be able to dispense with your presence." This bureaucratic form of address, produced by the mechanical force still active within him.

May looked up slowly. Her glance swept his face. "It's a long time until to-morrow," she said, and her moonstone eyes seemed to know not only everything that was passing within him, but everything that was ahead of him. "Good night."

In the studio the clouds of smoke were so thick that at first he could not distinguish the faces and remained unnoticed himself. About the round table were sitting twelve persons, men and women, drinking, smoking, talking, shouting, and laughing all at the same time. In a corner by the stove an absurdly liveried page, decked out in a theatrical costume, was fast asleep. He had probably served food and drink, and now his services had been dispensed with. Dozens of bottles of wine and champagne and spirits were standing on the table, and a huge array of glasses of all shapes and sizes. The company was evidently planning to play poker. Ortelli was shuffling the cards. The women, mostly colleagues of Lu's, including a well-known film-actress, had opened or half-dropped their garments. Their eyes, in their excessively reddened faces, had that peculiarly blind expression which comes into the eyes of women when they are in the grasp of their evil instincts. Laudin recognized several actors; next to the eternally smiling Ortelli, he recognized the inevitable baron, whose name he could never remember, and the film-director whom he had met here the other day. But when his dully searching look proceeded farther round that circle, he suddenly started as though someone had given him a blow on the head. He could not believe his eyes. For there sat Arnold Keller.

He sat next to Lu. He sat bent forward, as though lost in thought, with a brooding expression, yet wholly unexcited, as

though it were the most natural thing in the world for him to be sitting there beside the woman he adored. And Lu, too, looked as though everything were as it should be, and in perfect order, and not as though, a few hours earlier, she had acted as though the very sight of this man would drive her mad with hatred and disgust. Laudin could not take his eyes from these two. Had there been an explanation and reconciliation? But when? And if an explanation and a reconciliation were possible, why had there been that unheard-of conflagration of passion only a few hours ago?

He didn't know that Keller had simply walked upstairs. That was all. He had just made another of his attempts, without either expectation or hope. And then, when Lu had returned from the theatre, and had seen him standing in the anteroom, she had, contrary to all expectation and hope, welcomed him amiably, and invited him to spend the evening with herself and her guests. The cause? There was no special cause. Perhaps she was tired of contention. Perhaps she wanted to have peace for a while. Perhaps she had utterly forgotten the whole dreadful quarrel, or wanted to forget it to-night. Perhaps she didn't remember either her disgust or her hatred. Perhaps she had expended all the force of her hatred and abhorrence in that burning moment of passion, until there was nothing left of either. Perhaps, on the other hand, her success that evening, and the enthusiasm of the public, had softened her mood, and she enjoyed playing the part of the magnanimous heroine, which was usually reserved for Laudin's benefit. All these things were possible. Some were more probable than others. The thing, at all events, was neither remarkable nor noteworthy, and no member of that company, at least, seemed to find it so. The man had been imprisoned in a madhouse; the woman had got rid of him in this way; he had returned; for the moment they were again one heart with but a single thought. Here that was not considered either remarkable or amazing.

Only Laudin stood there, two paces from the table, and dared not trust his eyes. At last Ortelli saw him, and leaned over to Lu, and called her attention to him. At the same time Ortelli rose and bowed. He did not dare to include Laudin in the sloppy familiarity with which he treated the rest of his circle. Arnold Keller looked up, and he, too, rose at once. But his bow was deep and solemn. Ortelli and he were the only guests who were still half sober. The others took no notice of Laudin. Lu beckoned to him with uplifted arm, invited him to find a seat somewhere, and held up her champagne-glass in the direction of Ortelli. She laughed uninterruptedly; she had a wreath of leaves in her hair; her gestures and her whole demeanour had something unbraced and unbridled; and as though in token of this she had torn the shoulder-strap of her evening frock, and her left breast was almost bare. Her voice was hoarse and deep, and now and then had a gurgling resonance; her brown throat was turned now to this side and now to that; her eyes had the furious glitter of a *mænad's*. In the midst of an anecdote which was frankly filthy, although charmingly told, she felt Laudin's severely scrutinizing, searching glance upon her. She hastily finished her story: it was the story of a man, obviously known to all present, who had come home very tipsy, and had wanted to go to bed with his wife. Pulling back the coverlet, he had seen two women, and had begun to lament, thinking that he saw double. Her audience burst into roars of laughter, and while all, excepting Keller, who remained perfectly serious, gave themselves up to orgiastic merriment, she jumped up and stamped her feet, and cried: "This is stupid; this is utterly stupid!" With a gesture she commanded Laudin to come to her. He obeyed. She said it was stupid of him to stand there like the *Commendatore* in Mozart's opera; she would not permit it; he had no right to throw a shadow over her party; he must drink. She asked Ortelli to fill a glass with champagne, added some cognac, and handed it to Laudin.

"Drink up!" she commanded, and laid her bare arm about his shoulder.

He obeyed.

Again she filled his glass, and in the same manner; and again she commanded him to drain the glass. And this time she nestled closer to him, so that he could feel the pressure of her breasts, and she put both her arms round his neck. In order to drink at all he had to bend his head far backwards. His face had become perfectly colourless and almost wilted, but he smiled. It was the smile of a man whose soul was being sucked out of him. Was it the intoxication of her breasts? Was it the wild fragrance of her hair and body which made him obey? He obeyed and looked about at those grinning, cynical, curious or indifferent faces. As he turned his head a little, he suddenly said, startled, and in a strangely thin voice: "Please, please; one moment, please. . . ." And he looked in the direction of the door, which had opened.

Someone had entered. It was Fraundorfer.

58

Fraundorfer, and behind him Herr Schmidt.

He stood there in his coat, his slouch hat on his head, his thick cane in his hand, precisely as he had left Laudin's house twenty-four hours earlier. His face had its expression of sleepy watchfulness; he looked sidelong at the floor; his long, disordered, hay-coloured hair protruded from under his hat; he had not shaved for days, and his chin was covered with greyish stubble. His enormous frame filled the doorway; beside him Herr Schmidt looked like a white insect.

You could not tell from his expression why, having once entered, he lingered in the doorway. The reason could hardly have been that he wanted to draw to himself the attention of

all present, or that he wanted time to observe the company. It was certainly not like him to attempt to produce a calculated effect, and to take pleasure in its intensification. On the contrary, everything about him betrayed extreme hesitation, and almost furious discomfort. He loved neither tense moments nor dramatic situations. He had a profound contempt for all the theatrical elements of real life. He had a horror of calling people to account; the notion of being himself called to account was contrary both to his intellectual pride and to the lonely habits of his life. Just as it must have been something extraordinary that had persuaded him to cross this threshold, so it must have been at the inspiration of some higher perception that, having come, he delayed. A last glimmer of light had, as it were, to be extinguished.

With a gentle whine Herr Schmidt rubbed his head against his master's leg. Fraundorfer nodded to the little dog and began to move in the direction of the table. The baron and the film-actress drew suddenly apart. The laughter, the drunken babbling and crying had ceased. Apprehension and astonished glances sought the colossus. The fact that he still wore his slouch hat had an uncanny effect. He grasped his cane by the middle, and with the head of the cane he beat thrice upon the table, so that the bottles clattered and the cards and glasses danced. Then he pointed the forefinger of his left hand at Laudin and said, in his hoarse, bass voice: "I didn't put it off, after all. Herr Schmidt and I went to see the great medicine-man to-day. And it is for that reason that Herr Schmidt and I are here."

None of the people around the table seemed to find anything comical in either these words or in the man himself. They gazed at him as though his face had been a magnet and their eyes iron filings. With every second the silence deepened. All felt that something unheard-of had come upon them. Behind her chair, her empty champagne-glass still in her right hand, her brows contracted, her left hand involuntarily hiding her

naked breast, stood Lu, gazing now at her guests, now at Laudin, now at that unknown man who towered but two paces away from her, like a giant.

Laudin did not stir. His eyes, like Fraundorfer's, sought the floor. And Fraundorfer, now, without looking at his friend, grasped his cane with one hand, pointed with the other toward Laudin, and spoke once more: "You must tell her who I am, Dyskolos. Tell the woman who I am!" An oppressive silence. "You will not tell her? She doesn't seem to know. She doesn't seem to know that I am Fraundorfer."

Lu receded a step. Her face twitched. Fear, rage and indignation rose into her eyes. She tried to speak. Then there was a deafening crash. With all the strength of his powerful arm Fraundorfer had brought the head of his cane down on the table. Two glasses were in splinters. He raised his lids, and his steely glance sought out the pallid woman. "You destroyed him with your poisoned embraces, you foul slut!" he shouted at her.

She shrank farther back; her eyes were wide; she held the glass like a weapon in front of her.

"Confess!" he roared in a voice that vibrated through everyone's marrow. "Confess, you creature! Confess, or I'll throttle you as though you were a rabid cat! Confess that you poured the pestilence into his blood, you degraded creature! Confess that you robbed me of him! Confess, you whore!"

The costumed page started out of his sleep; he stood by the wall with open mouth and lifted hands. The people about the table looked like a group of waxwork figures.

A strange transformation came over Lu. Perhaps it was because fear and horror had wholly overcome her, or perhaps it was because the mere bodily appearance of that huge judge, that terrible creditor, drove her from all her accustomed defences; perhaps it was because the enormity of his threat, the unthinkable of physical chastisement, almost robbed

her of her reason (and here dark images from her earlier days may have risen before her)—whatever the reason, she began to tremble like an aspen leaf; she let the glass fall on the carpet, and bowed her head into her hands, and began to whimper like a schoolgirl.

"Good, good!" Fraundorfer jeered, "the monster issues a draft upon our emotions! He who has made it out and signed it is welcome to cash it. Ladies and gentlemen, who wants to cash it? Ha, you know well enough why you won't open your pockets. A forged cheque, a forged signature. A forgery. You have eyes, Dyskolos; you have ears. Do you need further proof?"

And turning once more to Lu, he asked, with a terrible implacability in his tone: "Why did you let it come to that, you infernal beast? Speak, I tell you!"

Weeping more loudly, Lu huddled her head between her shoulders.

"Why did you trample on that blossom?" Fraundorfer continued, in a voice that broke and became shrill. "Why did you massacre a father's only son? Why did you steal from him all he had, in the insolence of your sin? Why, woman, why, you mockery of a human creature, why did you rob the world of such a being? Is this pig-sty of a world filled with his kind? Why had you no compassion upon him, woman? Why give the pestilence to one whom it was bound to drive out of life? Why, I ask?" His last question was thunderous; he shook his fist in the air; thick rolls of fat hung like tumours over his colourless eyes, and from between the wrinkled lids flowed the tears that could not be concealed.

And suddenly those two faced each other weeping—each at an opposite pole of the world.

Lu raised her white face and stammered almost imperceptibly: "He knew it." It was clear that she was lying, that she did not expect to be believed, and that she was only groping for a way out at any cost.

Then slowly Arnold Keller rose. He had the air of a man who is going to make an after-dinner speech or appear before the curtain to inform the audience of a change in the programme. He laid down his cigar in an ash-tray, cleared his throat, and said: "I beg your pardon, sir. I may, perhaps, call your attention to the fact that this is no criminal court which can examine or condemn a culprit. Nor is it dignified to be so heated and so insulting. I should recommend a measure of reflection. Remember the saying of Seneca, *magnus animus remissius loquitur*. I venture to ask you whether this pitiable woman was born with the disease in question? Or whether she produced it in her own body out of voluntary wickedness; or is she not also an innocent victim in her turn? 'Fate lets our guilt upon us come,' it is written; and an even more venerable passage says: 'Deliver us from evil.' Therefore, my dear sir, not so fast and, with all due sympathy for your grief, respect the genius in this woman, and recognize the fact that her soul is taboo."

Fraundorfer's answer was a gurgle of laughter. He turned aside and croaked, still laughing in staccato fashion: "Herr Schmidt, do you understand that. . . . Help, Herr Schmidt. . . . I must appeal to you, Herr Schmidt; it chokes me . . . it takes one's breath away. . . ."

While he was roaring down at the dog and one almost had the impression that he was suffering from bodily pain, Lu had slipped down upon her knees and taken the hand of Arnold Keller, and pressed it against her bosom. The white, upturned face was that of a contrite Magdalen. The baron, who, like many of those present, felt the paralysing spell gradually passing away, murmured with delight at this picture. The film-director, completely drunk, got up and clapped his hands as he was accustomed to do when a pose entirely satisfied him, and said, with a clucking sound: "Bravo! First rate! Shoot! Oh, I say, shoot!"

This cry, in its boundlessly naïve vulgarity, had the quality

of a sudden revelation. It laid bare such a diabolically intricate web of craftiness, self-deception, histrionic exhibitionism, enslavement to mere sound and to the moment, and forgetfulness of all reality, and such an utter and many-sided unconsciousness of reality, that Fraundorfer, after some seconds of sombre silence, suddenly grabbed the brim of his hat, pulled it down almost over his eyes and, turning to Laudin, said with a strange friendliness: "Dyskolos, I am now going down to address a sermon to the stones in the street."

Laudin joined him where he stood: "Yes, Egyd, it is time to go," he said. "Permit me to accompany you."

Who was the man that uttered these words? He had a voice that no one had heard and an aspect no one had seen. "Permit me to accompany you." He seemed to be in doubt as to whether the permission would be granted. His face had aged, and it was moist and ashen. His hands made aimless gestures. He stumbled over the threshold. In the anteroom he had some difficulty, first in finding his cloak, then in putting it on. Fraundorfer had to help him. It took him several minutes to button his cloak.

A candle had been given them to light their way down. Fraundorfer held it and preceded his friend. His huge shadow covered the landings. At the bottom of the stairs Laudin said: "The knowledge that one has walked down a certain stair for the last time is one of the many communications with death that life has to offer."

"How do you know that it is the last time?" asked Fraundorfer in a hard voice.

"How do you know that you have finished a book when you have turned its last page; how do you know that you will never again drink out of a glass when it is broken? The stair; truly, the stair is but a symbol. But a glass, a book or a stair cannot melt into such utter nothingness as a human being who is hopelessly alienated from mankind, from God

and from the earth, and whose nothingness—oh, is there no stronger word; why are all words so meaningless?—whose nothingness we comprehend so little that we do not become aware of it until we look at the clock of our hearts and see that it no longer indicates the time.” He pressed his forehead against the banister, but immediately, ashamed of this weakness, resumed his former rigid bearing.

“That is fantastical, brother. Come,” said Fraundorfer, unmoved.

They were in the street. “Well, now we can try to preach to the stones!” cried Fraundorfer caustically, and struck the ground so violently with his cane that Herr Schmidt jumped backwards with a whine and looked reproachfully at his master. “Look at his contempt,” said Fraundorfer, and pointed to the dog; “look how full of contempt the beast is. Wretched crowd, he says to us, melancholy starvelings of illusion, melancholy vagabonds crowding a melancholy fair!”

“That is fantastic, too, Egyd,” said Laudin. His body was bowed again.

And then he said: “I am no longer living at home. I am living with Frau von Damrosch. Pia has arranged it. Pia and I will probably part.”

Fraundorfer murmured something incomprehensible. Silently they went the short distance to the Loebelstrasse. But it was evidently hard for Laudin to walk at all. “I’m cold,” he said. Then he proposed shyly that Fraundorfer should stay with him. To sharp ears the proposal was an insistent plea. Fraundorfer growled again, but the growl was a growl of consent. In the same oppressed and overmodest tone, Laudin then told him that in the morning he would have to confer with a remanded prisoner. It was a student whom, quite involuntarily, he had helped to push along the downward path. One of whose fate he was not wholly guiltless. He would have to talk to that man. Then he had another errand.

Then, at eleven, there was an important session in court that he must attend. He must get to Konrad Lanz as early as eight o'clock; before that he would have to see the judge or get him on the telephone for permission to see the prisoner. Hence the time during which he asked for Fraundorfer's society would, after all, be only a few hours.

All these remarks seemed to make Fraundorfer thoughtful. He put his arm through Laudin's and helped him to drag himself onward. The streets were completely empty.

At last they came to Laudin's new dwelling. Not without difficulty they used the several unaccustomed keys. Broodingly, Laudin looked about him at the room, which was hung with blue. At the foot of the bed stood the trunk which Pia had sent. And, considering all the incomprehensible things that had come to pass since that afternoon, when Laudin had first stood in this room, he murmured, as he had done then, as though the sight of the trunk mechanically produced in him an identical psychical reaction: "So this is Pia. . . ."

He let his cloak fall, and he himself dropped into an arm-chair. Fraundorfer also took off his cloak, threw his slouch hat on the floor, spread his huge body over a chair, and bent massively forward, leaning his chin upon his cane.

Herr Schmidt, silent as ever, the moist devotion of his glance upon his master, lay down between the two men.

Hours passed; the twilight of dawn came; then the day-break. The sun began to shine. Neither of the two men slept, and neither spoke.

At half-past eight o'clock Laudin entered the cell in which Konrad Lanz was detained. He had already conferred with the judge. Since a counsel for the defence had hitherto neither been appointed by the court nor demanded by the accused,

Laudin hardly needed the influence of his name to get to Konrad Lanz. The judge had been courteous and helpful, and had permitted Laudin to read the shorthand reports of the preliminary examination.

The cell was dark and rather small. The coverlet on the iron bedstead was not quite clean. The barred window was open. It gave on to the courtyard, around which stood a huge mass of buildings. Apart from the distant rumour of the city, beginning its daily life, all was still.

Lanz sat beside a rickety little table. An open book lay before him. His face was so emaciated that the rectangular cheekbones protruded and the cheeks had become mere hollows. Even the beardless lips seemed to have sunken in. His was an ascetic face, austere and silent, no longer that face of a suppliant which Laudin remembered. This circumstance alone gave the conversation a turn which could not have been foreseen, but which profoundly confirmed Laudin in the impulse which had brought him here.

He said he was completely informed. He was willing and determined to act as Lanz's counsel. It was true that criminal cases were rare in his practice. Nevertheless, he would do his very utmost, even though he might not appear personally at every stage. To-day, at least, he couldn't say whether he would be able to do so. Various things had taken place in his life which might necessitate a complete change in his arrangements, the precise character of which he could not yet foretell. If, then, it should be impossible for him to be always personally on the scene, he would nevertheless be acting as consultant, as *spiritus vector*, through an authorized representative. He assured Lanz that he considered this his duty. His interest in the matter was not merely professional. His motives were of another kind. It was unnecessary to explain them. He begged Lanz to realize that he had not appeared in order to confer a favour, as a representative of the power of society, upon a defenceless social outcast. He had come at the urge of an

inner necessity and—he said this hesitatingly—out of a feeling of community in guilt.

Lanz seemed surprised. Not excessively, only superficially. Perhaps it was because at this moment no human communication entered very deeply into his consciousness. Laudin was much more surprised when the young man, after staring intently at the floor for a while, declined his offer. Laudin, naturally, asked for his reason. Lanz answered that the notion of any defence gave him a feeling of discomfort. If his wishes and decisions were respected there would be no defence whatever. The thought of implicating a friend whom he so honoured in this matter, which he considered quite hopeless from the outset, only gave him additional and unnecessary pain. He was reconciled to his fate. He was wholly at one with himself. His fate was sealed and his life ruined. It mattered little to him what kind or what length of punishment was to be meted out to him.

Laudin objected that this mood of spiritual self-annihilation would not last, and ought not to be taken as a norm for the future. The mind has its ebb and flow like the tide.

Lanz shook his head. He was sure that there would be no change in him. He had always been quite clear as to the possible consequences. From the very first moment. The game had been a dangerous one. The stake was his head. The head being lost, what sense would there be in trying to save the arms and legs?

With a veiled glance Laudin replied that with an emotional logic of this kind there was a danger of undermining the entire structure of justice. Not only the existing, and, as he freely confessed, very faulty human structure, but also the very idea of a possible higher justice.

Lanz assured him that he believed neither in a higher justice nor in any possibility of development.

Laudin's answer was no answer at all; it was a conventional phrase. The ground beneath them began to shake. He himself

had loosened the soil. Secretly, to be sure. A man does not realize the number of his own restraints until others begin to throw theirs aside.

Lanz said that his greatest sin had been something like relying on a miracle. Towards the end he had balanced fate as on a knife's edge: a benefactor of humanity and a pillar of the scientific world, or else a condemned counterfeiter and jail-bird. He had had no time for long paths or gradual decisions. He had been like a runner whose breath gives out just before the goal, and who jumps into a car in the hope that he will not be observed. "Impatience is always foolish," he added. The fact was, however, that science had reached a point where hundreds of men were bound for the same goal. He who reached the goal first was not always the chosen of fate, but the most determined and the coolest.

His words had a curious, dry objectivity. He had been on the point of discovering the secret of the artificial production of sugar. He said this in a way that assumed Laudin's appreciation of the enormous importance of such a possibility. He indicated briefly that it would cause a complete transformation of economic life. But now he lay, hurt to death, upon that field of battle. This, too, shone through his words. All that he said was tinged with the spontaneous pride of something absolute. Like many scientists, he nursed an unconditioned adoration of science, a complete faith in its processes. When Laudin shyly suggested that the very importance of his end should have made him doubly careful in his choice of means, a sudden flash spread over his cadaverous face, and he began, in curiously disjointed sentences, to speak of his life, the very foundation of which had had, to use his own expression, something macabre about it. It wasn't so much a question of hunger nor of constant humiliation. There was always the feeling of squeezing by night through a fence into someone else's garden. Always he was crushed against the wall—at school, at the university, in the laboratory. Always dependent

on chance favours. Every book a favour, every glass retort a favour. Each term had started with petitions—written petitions, personal petitions. You had constantly to humiliate yourself, to show that you were deserving, and at the same time to swear that you were a respectable mediocrity, and that under no circumstances would you cherish ambitions that did not become your station. For all society is stricken with the fear that someone might leave the trodden road and strike out upon a new path. The worst had been the actual earning of his bread as copyist, tutor, coach. Every hour lost in this wretched fashion had finally hurt him like a wound. The feeling that time was running away from you was worse than actual want. The conquests of science on unchartered territory were increasing every day; each day knowledge expanded and judgments and interpretations were modified; great minds were continually at work; the neglect of an apparently unimportant fact might leave you far behind and reduce you to the position of a man discovering again the thrice-discovered. There stands nature, pregnant with her secrets; to decipher a single one often takes all the years of a man's life. But nature, stubborn and miserly, will not give up a secret if you do not woo her without ceasing, and promise her your heart's blood. He had done that. So much he could say with a clear conscience.

The question might be put, Konrad Lanz continued monotonously: what was the value of one's heart's blood? It was no article of merchandise, and society quoted no price for it. Nevertheless, he had undertaken, at the bidding of an inner decision, to transform into glittering coin a performance which as yet had no market value. He had anticipated its marketability. He had borrowed against it, so to speak. He had, as it were, taken out a mortgage on a house of which only the foundations were laid. Had he been able to finish building it, there would have been no doubt of his solvency. He had borrowed from society; to be sure, he had had no

visible security. The State was obviously the biggest and most unscrupulous of all counterfeiting concerns. Behind the notes it issued there was a promise, and this promise was generally a lie. Well, he had practised that same trade for a little while, and had increased the millions of scraps of lying paper by exactly fifteen. Imagination was paralysed by the monstrosity of the comparison. An analogy: A man bombards Mount Everest with fifteen pebbles. He is dragged off to prison for trying to cause an earthquake. Oh, yes, of course, he knew exactly what Dr. Laudin would reply, and would have to reply. If all the citizens of a State were to do the same thing, all society would fall into its component atoms. Each man would be a Morgan and a beggar at once; the cow would be feeding on itself instead of on grass. The present order of the world was such that in a case like his own the law was bound to become a very fury, and tear the transgressor pitilessly limb from limb. For to show him any mercy was equivalent to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire system. In brief, society had either to condemn him wholly or, since his particular crime would not be acknowledged as such by a divine tribunal, acquit him of wrong-doing. Since, on the one hand, the law chooses not only to ignore but to protect that which, on the other hand, it persecutes in the cruellest fashion, the individual's sense of justice was bound to wither and die. "In the outer world one is condemned. In the inner world one is pardoned, one is somehow, by some voice, freed of guilt. What a state of affairs! The written law outlaws me for ever, robs me of work, honour and reward. The living spirit within me cries: 'A crime is being perpetrated, a crime against life and against the intellect!'"

Yet he was resigned. He recognized that he had wronged the community. He was conscious of it. Only he found it hard to determine the boundary-line between inner justice and outer justice. He sat there, tormenting his brain. "Where lies the truth? Does it lie in my despair and my desperate

defence, in the fear for my mission and the relief that I sought, or does it lie in the implacable letter of the law, in this petrified concept which crushes my whole existence by merely stretching out its arm towards me, and annihilates me completely, whether it visits me with its severest measures, or permits some shadow of mercy to be wrung from it?" He was not interested in nuances. They could do him no good.

He was inwardly torn and tormented in an unheard-of fashion. A broken man, he sat before Laudin, and retracing the path that he had followed, sought with a disturbed and most uneasy conscience to gather up the fragments of himself. It was as though he was talking to himself. Hesitatingly he began again: "Now you're here with me, Doctor; you've been good enough to come . . . it's very strange . . . but when you came in it seemed to me as though you had never been away from me for long. It was like this . . . this very night . . . it was almost as though you were really here. No, I'm not maundering; I don't see ghosts. On the contrary, my mind has always been realistic; there is no room in it for dreams. To be sure, quite recently . . . to save as much as possible, you see, to use the counterfeited money only for the most indispensable things, I have been living almost entirely on bread and potatoes. I often felt as though I had no real blood left in my veins. Last night, after the preliminary examination, I dropped on to this bed here and everything went black before my eyes. I thought I was going to faint. But it wasn't that. Out of the blackness there rose a radiant circle. Suddenly I found myself in an immeasurably lofty chamber vaulted by an immeasurably wide and lofty dome. On the sides toward the south, the west and the north, there opened three mighty, arched doors; on the east side there stood a throne. Upon the throne sat a majestic figure, wrapped in purple. Instead of a face it had a mask of gold. I knew it was the Judge. Through each of the three great doors endless streams of human beings entered into the temple. I was in the midst of them. They were people

of all stations and classes, of all races and all regions of the earth, men, women, and children, greybeards, boys and girls. They uttered no sound, not even a murmur, but all, like myself, were full of the same emotion. What that emotion was I cannot describe. It was, at all events, a mighty emotion, half reverence and half beseeching. We all believed in that figure swathed in purple; upon it our whole fate depended; it inspired us with a trust of religious profundity. I was among the first, and as we came near to the throne we threw ourselves upon our knees, and the many, many thousands behind us followed our example. And now from those many, many thousands of throats there rose a single great cry: Justice! And in that cry there was a vast dread and longing, and a hopeful expectation which shook one to the very depths of one's soul. The figure remained silent. No fold of its purple garments stirred. And again, after a heart-breaking pause, that unbelievably heart-breaking cry: Justice! No answer from above. And I, I could endure it no longer. I knew that all these men had been driven hither by a great terror, the terror of something horrible, from which they had fled, and which would assuredly overtake them if they were not granted that which they besought. And so a bitterness came over me against that dumb form wrapped in purple; I grasped the mantle and tore it off; the mask of gold toppled and fell, and what we saw was a skeleton. Then a voice began to speak; and this is the strangest thing, Dr. Laudin. It was your voice. But I was no longer under that stupendous dome, but in an ordinary lecture-hall. I sat with other students, hearing you lecture. You were pointing to the skeleton and to the purple mantle that was lying at your feet, and you were saying: The time is past when this dead skeleton was a god and a judge. This god, as you see, has decayed, and his living law has moulded into dust. We have forgotten to feed the god with the living substance of our souls. For that reason he has become a framework of bones. We neglected to breathe new

breath into his icy body. Thence our sufferings and our doubts and our despair. You said that in your ordinary, everyday voice. I can hear that voice this minute. I knew, then, that there was no way of helping me."

He fell silent. In his expression was something visionary, and at the same time extinguished. Since Laudin looked down, embarrassed and silent, he murmured: "It was no dream. It was as real as the fact that you are sitting here now."

Laudin said: "I am willing to assume that it was no dream. Dreams are not apt to be so symbolical. Let us assume it to have been a vision of truth. In the last resort I could say similar things . . . or think them. In any event, it seems to point the way. Provided, of course, that one can summon up faith in the resurrection of this god. These are possibilities which, in my opinion, are excluded from the lives of anyone now living, unless he were to break with everything that lies behind him. It is a very inclusive thing, justice. An idea. Law; that is something else. Law is a tool. A very earthly thing. Very accessible and very plastic. But to establish a proper relation between justice and law is as difficult as to establish such a relation between punishment and guilt. That relation seeks to be and should be wholly valid, and is full of contradictions. It should be wholly pure and is full of impurities. Demands for penalties that are too rigorous destroy humanity just as surely as negligence or venality and bribery. Rigidity is hostile to progress. I can imagine a time, a very distant one, to be sure, in which the concept of punishment will sound as remote and barbaric as the notion of legal torture seems to us to-day. Many have come to me to find justice—far, far too many. I had to console them and put them off as best I could, and dared not lay violent hands upon the purple. I had to feed them on formulas, on expedients, on equivocations. Man becomes inured to nothing so quickly as to the inadequate. But that vision of yours, or whatever you choose to call it, may help to point the way. Whether

it can help me is another question. As far as I am concerned it is probably far too late."

He arose, and breathing deeply, he added: "Every time that justice is done or comes to pass, it is really only the compassion of some higher being, which, contrary to our human intention, is yet working in and through us."

"A hopeless enough saying," Konrad Lanz said sadly.

"Yet I know none that contains more hope," Laudin replied, with an unintentional double meaning.

With that he went, silently determined to include the unhappy man, even against his will, among the clients whose affairs were still in his hands.

60

Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the house in which Brigitte Hartmann lived. He had forgotten the address, and had been forced to ring up his office.

A dirty-looking charwoman ushered him into a large, desolate room, which seemed to be at once a sitting-room and a nursery. All kinds of toys were lying about; deflated balloons, picture-books and paper helmets. These things lay about on the green rep chairs and on the cheap carpet.

The door opened. Brigitte Hartmann appeared. Scarcely had she recognized the visitor than she uttered a cry and disappeared once more. It was some minutes before she returned, this time with a many-coloured shawl about her shoulders, and a fillet of silver ribbon, which gave her a most comical appearance, binding her hair above her forehead. After ten years' exile at Hartmannshof she had, in her own peculiar manner, readopted the customs and the fashions of the city. Astonishment, timid joy, uneasy surprise, and the signs of a bad conscience flickered over her coarse features.

All she could do was to stammer. She put a chair in the middle of the room and eagerly brushed the seat. She went to the window, pulled at the curtain, came back, moved the chair to another place, said something about illness, the unexpectedness of his visit, the earliness of the hour, and all the time she anxiously avoided looking at her caller. Her excitement increased. Finally she asked in an unnaturally loud tone of voice whether she could not offer the doctor a trifle—some bread and butter, a little glass of slivovitz; it could be got at once; it was no trouble at all; it would give her the greatest pleasure.

Laudin said: "Let us waste no time in trivialities, Frau Hartmann. The reason for my visit is soon explained. I don't even know whether an explanation is necessary. You have probably heard or read what has happened to Konrad Lanz."

An understanding gleam came into Brigitte Hartmann's face. Certainly, Doctor. Of course, Doctor. Of course, she had read the accounts. She and her cousin had discussed it all evening yesterday. She seemed suddenly liberated as from a nightmare. The evil conscience was forgotten, and she looked at Laudin with radiant triumph. Well, now what did the doctor think of that? Forging banknotes! That was roguery for you; that was scoundrelism. Hadn't she always prophesied that those people would come to a bad end? She had a good scent for such things; she knew their kind; no one was going to take her in. It was all as clear as daylight now. Now the doctor could see how pure her intentions had been. Now he would admit the bitter injustice that had been done her. She was happy, now. More happy than she could say. She could weep for happiness. It might sound a little heartless, to be sure; the misfortunes of others should be respected. But now—she thanked God and all his saints, and she was going to light a votive candle at the altar in the church, although she wasn't one of the extra-pious, not to speak of

bigotry, of course—but now since her innocence had come to the light of day, no one could grudge her the little bit of joy that it brought her. Didn't the doctor think so, too? If you please. . . .

The torrent of words died. The arms akimbo dropped. Her glance wandered into the corners of the room, came back, fled again, found no resting-place, and finally returned, full of cowering dread, to Laudin's eyes.

Laudin had put both his hands upon her shoulders. Nothing more. He gazed at her. Nothing more. His face had the expression of a profound and sacred and painful earnestness. The pressure and burden of this man's hands resting upon her shoulders seemed to have a disintegrating effect upon Brigitte Hartmann. One might say, perhaps, without exaggeration, that here a psychic power achieved a physical effect, completely subduing and disarming her.

"On the day when you stole that will from your husband's desk," said Laudin, in a whisper, yet with a sharp, clear emphasis upon each word, "was it not plain to you, Brigitte Hartmann, that by that deed you destroyed the frugal existence of two human beings, a mother and a child?"

Brigitte Hartmann's face turned as yellow as straw. "I . . . I . . . I . . ." she stammered, whispering too, but she got no further.

"And though you may have been strong enough or insensitive enough not to feel the effect of this death-sentence of which you were guilty," Laudin continued, in the same whisper, "whence did you summon the courage to appear before me and to appeal to me for protection?"

"I . . . I . . . I . . ." the woman stammered, and now that yellowish pallor had reached her very eyes.

"The crime cannot be repaired, but it can be expiated," said Laudin, and his two hands weighed like heavy stones upon the woman's shoulders. "I am convinced that you really desire me to consider you and to respect you as a fellow-

creature, Brigitte Hartmann. At least, I have that impression. I am willing to show you the path that you must take in order to appear in my eyes and in your own as a woman who has a right to a share in the respect of her fellow-men."

Brigitte Hartmann had probably never heard such words in her life. It is to be assumed that the silent confession in her face, that the confused obedience which her demeanour expressed, were far less the result of a moral collapse, or of submission to an overwhelming moral influence, than of a typical hysterical condition. This condition, however, was itself a result of that poverty of the heart, that emotional coldness, that alienation from all tenderness, reverence and human kindness, which has become too common a phenomenon among women of her kind and class for them ever to realize it, or reflect upon it, or to bewail their fate.

"What must I do, Doctor?" she barely breathed; "what do you ask of me? I'll do anything. . . ."

"I demand that the estate of your husband be equally divided between yourself and Caroline Lanz. That is, I think, a very fair demand. In my presence you will write to the bank and direct it to transfer the sum in question to my firm. So soon as you have done that, I shall have the account released. I'll dictate the letter to you now."

From the brief-case which he had laid on the table he took out a fountain-pen and a sheet of paper. With the obedience of a marionette, Brigitte Hartmann sat down at the table, took up the pen and, with trembling hand, wrote what he slowly dictated. When she had signed her name, he folded the letter, put it in his pocket, and said, with a bow, as though he were taking leave of a great lady: "This is the last episode of our acquaintanceship, Frau Hartmann. We both have reason to congratulate ourselves that our relations have found so excellent a close. Good-bye."

These poor and pedantic phrases fulfilled more or less the function of a walking-stick upon which an utterly exhausted

man supports himself when he is forced to keep up appearances.

Brigitte Hartmann gazed after him with glassy and astonished eyes. She listened to the echo of his steps. Then she uttered a short, rather crazy laugh, like the clucking of a hen, and dropped into a chair.

61

In spite of his exhaustion, Laudin still found strength to do the one thing that remained for him to do this day, and which, undoubtedly, seemed to himself the most indispensable of all.

Doubtless he could have taken another way of attaining the purpose which he had in mind, and which, for some reason, he did not very closely examine. He could have chosen a way that was less public, less provocative, less exposed to calumny. Had he been in a more equable mood, in a more trivial or in some respects a more worldly frame of mind, he would himself have conceived the doubts which, later on, even his most well-meaning friends did not feel it possible to dismiss.

Much was said and written of the case at the time. It was certainly most unusual for an advocate of the highest reputation and the greatest influence to refuse to continue to act for his client in the court itself and on the very day of the trial, and his behaviour had a special topical interest, for a few weeks earlier, the very same thing had happened in a notorious trial for fraud in Rome. There, too, an advocate of high rank and repute had declared himself unable, at the last moment, properly to represent the interests of his client, since a renewed and careful study of the documents, and an examination of his own conscience, had convinced him that he could not plead the prisoner's cause with that conviction which both he and his client had the right to demand. At the same time,

and quite independently of these actual events, a play appeared upon many stages in many countries and was widely discussed, in which the same conflict appeared.

The point that was especially debated was whether, from a human or professional point of view, a lawyer had the right to act thus, especially at so dangerous, not to say fatal a moment for those most nearly concerned as the beginning of the trial. Although the case from which Laudin withdrew at the last moment was, on the face of it, not of a sensational character, being a mere civil suit relating to the inheritance of money, yet his dramatic retirement stirred up a surprising amount of dust. Public opinion was divided between indignation and half-suspicious amazement. The matter was connected with the not very creditable rumours which were beginning to be current about Laudin, and which now came into the open, as vermin will scurry forth from an abandoned house. Later the chamber of advocates took up the matter and produced a whole series of counsels' opinions and deductions.

Laudin himself did not think of the consequences of his act. On the day and at the moment of the incident he had, in fact, no power to think or reflect. Never before, perhaps, had he acted to such an extent under the influence of a mental obsession. It was like the inevitable running down of a mechanism. When the machinery has done its appointed work, it simply stops. His conflict had little to do with the case that was to come into court that day. The case of *Altacher v. Ernevoldt* had become indifferent to him. What counted with him was the scene, or even more, the image of it engraven upon his brain. Trivialities were more decisive than the nature of the case which was about to be heard. The offices and the courthouse flooded his mind with joyless memories. This air, so impregnated with dust and mould, had it not on innumerable occasions paralysed aspiration and stifled the purity of the will? These numbers and names on

the doors, these printed notices on the walls of the corridors—the eye had swept over them numberless times, receiving an impression of things hoary and outworn, and of the hopelessness of endless repetition. There is a No. 17. It looks and has always looked like a man who has been beaten till he is crooked and grasps a pole for support. For eternities (so it seems; the actual time may have been a year) the list of magistrates has shown a repulsive brown splotch in the midst of the printed text. The fourth flight of stairs on the second story is more hollowed out by footsteps than any other. It has been a source of annoyance a thousand times that at one place the stair-rail is full of splinters and scratches one's hand. There are the faces of the court attendants, which never change. There are the secretaries and clerks, self-importantly confidential. There is the window of the house opposite, where, for years and years, a bearded man in a little cap has been standing and filling his pipe, as though he had never, at any time in his life, done anything else, and had looked since the day of his birth precisely as he does now.

In the twilight corridors the litigants are sitting, silent, patient, modest, resigned. You had the impression that years ago people must have taken up their dwelling here in order to wait, just in order to wait. It is like an anteroom to hell, the hell of waiting. The act of waiting gives them a specific expression of wretchedness, which is the same on all these faces. Waiting has made them weary and indifferent and soulless. Waiting is their fate. They look at the numbers, No. 17 or No. 46 (the latter looks like a rheumatic old woman trying to sit down), or at the names of referees or secretaries or judges, or the announcements and notices; and their imagination and their desire to live have slowly withered.

It seemed to Laudin as though he were walking onwards between two rows of his clients, men and women. There was no end to those rows. They had gathered as for some public event. They sat there like shades, and he, equally a shade.

passed on between them. All looked at him expectantly; all demanded of him the ordering of their lives, and measured justice, and their rightful due. But he was no judge; he had no power over the law. He never concealed from them his powerlessness, the inadequacy of the intermediary or middleman. But they shook their heads; it was their firm opinion that for their sakes, that is to say, for the sake of each individual, he could play some little trick on the law and hasten the decision that was to redeem them. Their unabashed illusion wounded him; their demand, repeated a thousand times, bored him to the point of pain; nevertheless, he was courteous and helpful and ready with expedients, because he knew that they were waiting, waiting, waiting. What were they waiting for? For a slothful mass to set itself in motion over there in Room 20; for innumerable documents to be examined and unspeakable human suffering to be registered letter by letter. It was enough to make one believe that the angels in heaven and the devils in hell also do nothing but wait, while there souls beg for admission and here swelter in the fiery cauldron.

Was that all that he had accomplished for more than twenty years—to wait with those that were waiting? And for this his reward had been an unfailing income, securities in the bank, a house and a car, reputation and popularity.

One must not earn money by half-justice, by justice that miscarries, by justice that fails, by justice that is its own antithesis. Though he could tell himself that he had, to the best of his ability, defended the ignorant and the defenceless against the arbitrariness and the false assumptions of those gods of clay, yet he himself had become too profoundly the victim of these powers to continue to draw self-respect from so poor a consolation.

The upshot of it all?

He suddenly remembered that in this particular section of the corridor between Rooms 62 and 24 (how singular that it was just this not very significant nor very remarkable recol-

lection that overtook him now), that about eight or nine years ago an excited client had come up to him and had said: "Do impress the fact on the judge that it is this one thing and nothing else which has destroyed my life and my happiness, this one thing alone: the way she let her stockings sag. Out in the world she was a fashion-plate; I had to pay for the latest things from Paris; at home she went about with her stockings coming down. I can't stand it any longer; I shall go raving mad if I have to go on seeing those stockings bunched around her ankles." Of course, the man's suit for a divorce was dismissed; perhaps he had always been crazy, since he could not assign any other reason for his morbid hatred. The fact remained that he killed himself next day. On account of the stockings. But those stockings do certainly symbolize the many trivial and ridiculous things which destroy life and liberty just as surely as an officially recognized tragedy involving faithlessness and murderous revenge.

He had nothing to show but facts like these, only the long chain of his half-defeats before their brutal reality. He had done much, and effected nothing; his will had been good, his results had been ill. Everything had been partial, nothing had been complete; he had brought proselytes to the purple and helped to conceal the skeleton beneath. For he, if no other, he should have known that there was nothing but a skeleton beneath. (Confused by his own experiences, he had made another's vision his own.) Thus had fate shown a logic hard as adamant, making him shatter head and heart against the incarnate lie, by permitting an identical and pestilential poison to bring bodily death to one on his radiant upward course, and to corrode the mind and eternally darken the path of him who was already on the downward slope.

Judgment had been given and had become law.

His sadness was as deep as a well; it penetrated deeper and deeper into his being, and reached the region where there was nothing but the blackness of death.

When, standing in military erectness at the counsel's table, his face as white as a plaster mask, he had announced his fateful decision, it had seemed to everyone as though he were not addressing the court, but exclusively that Dr. David Kerkowetz who faced him, heavily triumphant, and as though his withdrawal from the case was, in truth, nothing but a definitive withdrawal from the other's person and sphere of activities. May Ernevoldt had not appeared. It had been impossible to serve a summons on Bernt Ernevoldt; he could not be found.

Constance Altacher was sitting near Kerkowetz. She was dressed in mourning and had raised her black veil. She looked at Laudin with the great, urgent, restless, truthless eyes of a patient sufferer. There was the phenomenon incarnate. There was that conceit, that conceit of grief, of knowing better, of having higher sources of knowledge—that conceit which, in its self-indulgence, breeds hatred, stupefies peoples, degrades nations; that eyeless, imageless, rayless and inexpugnable conceit, triumphant in the end, at least in this world of appearances, and here and now with Laudin's help and by his decision.

Here only the defeated could be victorious.

Then he drove home, that is to say to the apartment of Frau von Damrosch, and went to bed in a high fever. He succeeded in concealing his condition from the old lady. But rather late that evening, when the leaden twilight in his brain had yielded to an empty dreaminess, he heard a careful knocking at his door.

It was Pia, who came from Egyd Fraundorfer.

All that afternoon she had walked about the house, restlessly, from room to room. She had had a kind of silent explanation

with herself; it was a weighing and a viewing of issues. Perhaps she was considering how all these rooms and the complicated things that filled them had robbed her of life and freedom; perhaps she was trying to determine whether she had not given too much of herself to all this. Or perhaps she already knew that it had been too much, and was measuring and estimating and wondering and regretting. About her there was an air of leave-taking and farewell, as though she were saying: Enough of this; we must now begin something else. She visited the cellar and the attic and the various store-rooms, and was amazed at the amount of dead things that were heaped up. Perhaps it occurred to her that every woman is carrying about on her shoulders just such a load of useless things, which have rusted or mouldered in vain, waiting for some purpose. A woman might not notice this accumulation, because it took place with treacherous gradualness. And then one day she might break down under the burden. Quite modestly and quietly, and to her own surprise, she might one day find herself suffocated under such a mass of unworthy and thankless trash. There were boxes stuffed with old newspapers, broken toys, photograph frames, broken china, cracked inkpots; there were little tables with only three legs, and dolls without a head; there were worn-out trunks, old calendars, worn boots, empty canisters, discarded clothes, moth-eaten rugs, battered watering-cans, worm-eaten chests, and tarnished mirrors. Each of these objects had once had its living present, its justified claim and its speech; each had now become a dismal unworthy burden. Here was a graveyard which women kept out of a foolish sense of duty. As though to nurse skeletons were a task that they had contracted to perform; as though rubbish could re-arise and offer new delight and service; as though there were no stars in the sky above.

But other things, too, recede and fall away like empty trappings. There comes a new independence, and a condition

of direct vision emerges from a brooding amazement. Each thing within the circle of our vision withdraws to its proper distance. But this general rectification and proportioning of life does not take place without a peculiar pain, nor without gnawing remorse, nor without a care-worn consciousness of neglect that can never be repaired.

During all these hours, Relly followed at her mother's heels. It was after school, and she declared that her lessons for the next day were done. She busied herself here and there, but always remained close to her mother. Yet she was most careful to ask no questions, and only now and then looked at Pia with a secretly considering glance. "You might do something much more sensible, Relly, than run about at my heels like a little dog," said Pia once. "Something more sensible?" Relly asked, with doubtfully upturned nose. "There aren't so many sensible things to do, and the foolish things are sometimes not the least agreeable." That night, at table, she looked at her father's chair, suddenly turned quite pale, and, choking over a potato as though it had been too hot, she said: "For a whole week, whenever I've thought of him, I've had a feeling of distance and estrangement." She began to cough, and Marlene, who had gazed at her plate in austere embarrassment, patted her back with an air of reproof and superiority. Marlene was filled with a limpid sense of reality; she gave no more attention to her premonitions than was consistent with things seen and done.

The sisters said good night to their mother, but a few minutes later Relly slipped back into the room. For a moment she remained near the door, with her arms hanging loose and her eyes blinking strangely. Then, bursting into tears, she fell upon Pia's neck. After drawing back, half in vexation and half in embarrassment, Pia was about to soothe the excited girl. But Relly had already drawn herself up; she hastily passed her hands over her wet face, hurried to the door, and, there turning round, said in a courageous, encour-

aging tone, and with a tenderly persuasive smile: "There is one thing that you must not forget, mother; you can count on me, whatever happens."

Half an hour later, at about a quarter to nine, Pia dressed to go out. She left the house, went through the desolate suburban street to the station of the "electric"; and, wedged in among drunken men from the wine-shops, she travelled to a station from which in a few minutes she could reach Fraundorfer's house. Since this visit was the result of mature deliberation, there was not the least hesitation or sign of nervousness in her bearing or in her expression.

She was ushered into the disorderly study, and received by Fraundorfer with a mixture of emphatic ceremoniousness and growling taciturnity, and by Herr Schmidt as a personality whose scent was not familiar, but not completely alien, and who could therefore be endured. Fraundorfer was wearing a greasy dressing-gown, full of ink-stains, which robbed his limbs of what contours they possessed, and made him look like a huge mattress. His face was deeply furrowed, morose, full of hostile twitchings and sardonic reserves. A white cloth was tied round his forehead. He said he was suffering from neuralgia. The two white ends of the cloth projected from his hay-coloured hair like two sails which had somehow got tangled up in a thicket. Pia thought he looked inexpressibly old. At first she was intimidated, and it was difficult for her to explain to him her simple and easily intelligible errand.

Fraundorfer did not wait to be asked twice. In the complete frankness with which he revealed to her Laudin's intellectual and psychological condition, and the so-called fascination resulting from the far-reaching division in his inner life, there was something icily cruel and even scornful. He seemed to be discussing the minute characteristics of an historical personage. He spared neither the absent man, nor her who heard him, nor himself. Several times he laughed resonantly, and turned, as though waiting for applause, to Herr Schmidt.

This was whenever he had used a particularly cutting or crushing turn of speech. Pia grew alternately hot and cold in the course of this pitiless and passionate analysis, which was, at bottom, an act of self-laceration, and a half-tamed outburst of despair over the unforgettably and unforgettable loss of his son. At the very end he changed his tone and recounted to her, coldly and precisely, the events of the previous night.

After a long silence, Pia whispered: "I'm afraid that's much worse than I feared."

"I imagine so," Fraundorfer agreed drily. "I take it to be the kind of illness from which one does not recover."

Pia quivered. "No," she said, with a curiously tired and distracted smile. "I don't agree with you. I don't think the sickness is incurable."

"As one looks at it," said Fraundorfer testily. A contradiction from a woman always struck him as something thoroughly improper. "In consideration of the nature of our Dyskolos, I have my doubts. He is one of those people who stick to the trail with the patience of a well-trained bloodhound. At least, to the idea of it. He has a grim sort of logic. That's clear again from the affair that is exploited in all the afternoon papers——"

"What affair? I know nothing and have read nothing." Pia was startled.

Fraundorfer picked up a paper from the table. "Here you are. Frau Blum considered it her business to offer me this latest stew while it was still warm." And while Pia read, not only with her eyes, but with her nerves, the greatly exaggerated report of that day's scene in the court, he rattled on: "I'll grant you, there's a certain style about it. Up to a certain point, I'm almost prepared to be impressed. To take the soup-pot from the stove and fling it hot into people's faces—there's something in that. But to what purpose, after all? An empty demonstration. And naïve and quixotic, like that business with the actress. Yes, yes, Herr Schmidt, you're

quite right. Better hold our tongues in that respect. We haven't used our tongue to the best advantage, either, and have ourselves wallowed in many a slough. The bellies of the dwellers in Olympus and Valhalla are shaking with laughter over our swinishness and asininity."

Pia did not hear these remarks. She had dropped the paper on her knees, and her glance, which had an inward glow, penetrated into a new and alien world.

"Ah, my lady Pia, it is a wretched business," Fraundorfer said, proceeding toward his peroration, "the author of the history of human stupidity has gone into the depths, down among the most miserable and the most foolish of his subjects. He has revealed himself as a romantic. He went forth, with his ill-digested mysticism, to act the part of Judgment Day. Such a meretricious mixture of ethics and literature and plain imbecility! An attempt to indulge oneself through the imagination! To overwhelm people with one's imagination! Oh! Oh! No sobriety! No humour! No realism!"

Undoubtedly his potations had already exceeded the ordinary. An empty, thick-bellied bottle stood on the table. Pia rose. He scarcely noted it, or heard the quiet words with which she took her leave of him. Herr Schmidt accompanied her to the threshold. For a while Fraundorfer sat gloomily staring; then he rose heavily. He snorted and shook himself, and lit one of his mighty cigars, and sat down with a growl at the desk on which reposed his voluminous manuscript. Sarcastically he regarded the title, put the title-page aside, took up a fresh sheet of paper, and wrote:

Egyd Fraundorfer
Fellow-Citizen and unwilling Contemporary
Dedicates
This Unfinished and Never to be Finished Work
To his most dear friend
Friedrich Laudin
The Errant Guide and Pathfinder
The Helpless Helper
The Administrator of Men and Things and Selves

For two days and two nights Pia nursed Laudin uninterruptedly. She called in no physician, not only because Laudin had begged her not to do so, but because it was clear to her that his condition was one of depression and exhaustion for which rest was the only suitable cure. She kept in touch with the house and the children by telephone. The chambermaid brought her the few things that she most needed. She informed the firm of Laudin's indisposition. Frau von Dammrosch made several offers to help, which Pia declined with thanks. Twice a day Marlene and Relly looked in on their way home after school. Pia did not admit them to their father's room. She exchanged a few words with them outside; she soothed them in her cheerful and superior fashion.

The same cheerfulness marked the services which she rendered Laudin, the brief questions which she asked him, her answers to his own questions. She would sit beside the open window with a piece of embroidery or, occasionally, with a book. When she raised her eyes her glance travelled thoughtfully over the early green of the tree-tops in the park opposite. At meal-times she went into the kitchen and carried the dishes which she had ordered, and which had been prepared according to her directions, to Laudin's bedside. She herself ate alone in the next room.

Laudin silently followed her with his eyes as she went to and fro, or as she sat by the window or, in the evening, under the shaded lamp. He observed the lovely curve of her forehead, the clear-cut features, the smooth golden hair, the still youthful and flexible figure, and he seemed to be seeking, to be seeking something. At no time did the singular silence that lay between them become painful or oppressive. But it had an element of expectancy in it, and something that pointed to a gradual convergence of significant thoughts.

Finally, rather late on the evening of the second day, when Pia was about to make some final preparations for the night, Laudin sat up a little against his pillows, propped his head on his hand, and said: "We must make our decision, Pia. We can't put off any longer doing the things that must be done."

"Haven't you come to your decision, yet?" Pia asked in surprise, or in apparent surprise, and passed the finger-tips of her left hand over her left temple, a frequent gesture of hers, especially when, as now, she sat down to talk. "I thought you had long ago arrived at a conclusion. It doesn't seem to me that there is much to talk about. I suspect that you have really mapped out your road, Friedrich. As far as I am concerned, I have but to agree and submit. I told you that, and I haven't changed my mind. Pretend that you have a client before you. You're accustomed to that situation. You're accustomed to saying: Such and such things must be done. So let me be like a client. I shall obey you as completely."

Laudin looked at her searchingly. "That sounds very sensible, Pia," he answered, "and very considerate, and, at bottom, intensely proud. There is more than a little pride in one's attitude when one says: dispose of me; I shall do precisely as you wish. It is the obverse side of pride, the pride of renunciation, of giving in, by means of which the adversary—forgive me the word, but every explanation creates an adversary—is disarmed and put to shame. But I should not like to be disarmed and put to shame by you. I should like to come to an understanding with you, to a sincere and frank understanding, such as is suitable between two good and tried friends and companions. I do not know the exact state of your feelings. I do not know the precise attitude with which you are confronting me, nor with what reservations, although you are apparently so trustful, you are placing yourself in my hands."

"Reservations? I really haven't any, Friedrich; I give you my word of honour," Pia assured him.

Laudin continued in his warm, insistent voice: "After all that has happened, I don't want you to believe that I am merely trying to attain to that comfortable male luxury of having you help me toward a clean conscience and to have you erect some blue heaven of friendship over our heads. I have too much experience in such things, Pia—the most horrible, the most implacable experience—too much, at all events, not to know what lies of consolation and evasion and procrastination may not be hidden by the word friendship at such moments of decision as we have reached. If we were friends, what would there be to decide? Friendship needs no decisions. You have nothing like that to fear from me, none of these painful retardations by dwelling on ideas that are full of misunderstanding and even treachery. I want only to see clearly. I want to know your motives and your judgment, and something of your emotional condition, in order that I may adjust both my inner self and my life accordingly."

Pia made a helpless gesture. "What am I to answer you?" she asked. "You must know how it is; surely you do know it. I don't want to be an obstacle. If you desire to change your life and to rebuild your fate, I simply don't want to interpose myself between you and your determination. I could never forgive myself for that. I could never look you honestly in the eyes again. Pride? Oh, yes, perhaps there is an element of pride in that. Do you grudge me the pride that is to protect me from the self-contempt which I should feel were I to be an obstacle in your path?"

There was a lustre in the depths of her eyes. Laudin could not take his glance from her. A growing suspense and curiosity took possession of him. It was not her words that shook him out of his disconsolate and fatalistic quietude, but her tone, a certain echo in her tone, a pregnancy which permitted him to suspect the unsaid beneath the said, which

thus, but in a beautiful sense, was somewhat less than wholly frank. He wanted to question her. Since she had not the talent of giving herself quite freely and of her own accord, he wanted to help to liberate her from that lack of freedom. It seemed important to him, important above all things. He asked: "May I ask you a few things?" Of course she had no objection. It seemed to her the simplest solution that he should ask and that she should answer. All the while she observed with astonishment his curiosity, his suspense, his sudden vivacity and restlessness. She looked down at herself as if she had become different and strange. Women sometimes have the mysterious sensation of changing wholly within a few minutes, under the watchful eyes of a man; or else they acquire from those eyes the certainty and confirmation of a change that has already taken place.

At first he thought that he would have to ask only two or three questions. As a matter of fact he asked a great many. He asked so many that it began to seem as though he had not seen Pia for years, and had heard nothing from her. One question gave place to another, and Pia tried to answer each as well as possible, careful of accuracy, and gaining more and more courage from Laudin's glance and demeanour. First he asked her whether she had been aware of the whole extent of his unblest adventures, when she had persuaded him to move away from home. No, not entirely she said; only what people had told her, what she had learned from Brigitte Hartmann's malevolent distortions, and more especially what his own behaviour and mood had betrayed. With that she had had to be satisfied. The essential things she had learned from Fraundorfer. Strangely enough, it had neither surprised her so much nor stricken her so profoundly as one might have expected. He wanted to know why this was so. She said that she could not explain it. Somehow or other the revelation had been in her long ago.

He asked her whether she realized how great, how im-

measurably great his misfortune was? Almost modestly she replied that she thought she did, that it had rolled upon her like a mountain. He wanted to know whether she realized that it was not a misfortune of definite outlines, nor an accidental one, nor one that had depended upon an encounter with anyone, or upon sensual impulses, but one that had arisen in accordance with the laws of his very mind, and was precipitated by life itself? Yes, of that, too, she had had her suspicions; now she knew it, of course; though she was afraid she did not wholly understand it. She lowered her eyes, to raise them again, attentively and willingly, to his own. He asked her whether, if she had been enlightened by Fraundorfer on the morning of that decisive day, she would have spoken quite as she had done, in the same moderate and thoughtfully friendly fashion. Undoubtedly, just the same. And would she, too, he continued, have left him in uncertainty as to how much she knew, what she suspected and supposed, and not have told him, even if a dismal certainty had tarnished his image in her heart?—She hesitated for a moment, and then said that his image had not been tarnished for her, could not become tarnished.—But since, by her own confession, she had been full of restlessness and of half knowledge, he inquired why she had not come to him, and why she had not asked for an explanation?—To that she could only answer that that was not her way; it was not in her nature.—He urged that she might have given him so much of her confidence.—Since he did not speak out she would have considered it an unjust attack upon his personality to persuade him to do so.—How did she know, he asked, that he was not waiting for her to persuade him?—She was sure that he had not been waiting.—Perhaps it would have saved him, or at least helped him.—She replied that their lives had never been lived in such a fashion. There had never been a question of mutual explanation between them. She knew and had long adjusted herself to the fact that his whole life and activity were endangered

by other people's futile explanations and vociferations. Hence she had long ago trained herself to be silent, to refrain from disturbing him.

He was more and more astonished. There was an expression on his face as though he could not grasp the fact that it was really she, Pia, who sat beside him there, the same Pia who for seventeen years had walked beside him, smiling, ordering, adjusting, sparing, almost wordless, and, as was now clear, almost unknown. So that is Pia, he seemed to say to himself, with the same consternation which had overtaken him when he had stared at the trunk. But this time it had the power of a more living revelation. He leaned back among the pillows and pressed his hand against his forehead and reflected. In the meantime Pia moved her chair a little nearer to the bed. After a while he sat up again.

He wanted to know whether she hadn't felt that he had betrayed her.—No, she had never considered him capable of betraying either a human being or a cause. If what he had done or, rather, what he had suffered, had seemed to her a betrayal, that is to say, if she had had occasion to doubt his honour and veracity, she would not have asked him to leave the house; she would have left the house herself. She accompanied these words by a strange smile and moved still a little nearer. Laudin was startled. His robust male psychology had not been aware of this distinction; it gave him an insight into the delicacy and strength of her perceptions. But, he objected, as though to test her more profoundly, and thus to obtain a greater and higher certainty of her, such a doubt would have been perfectly legitimate under the given circumstances.—Why, she asked in astonishment, was he trying to shake the foundations as she had never dared to do?—Because he could not acquit himself of all guilt, because it was his infernal duty to be frank with her. She shook her head. If he were to begin to talk about guilt, they would get into a fog, she said still more seriously, and moved nearer to the very edge of

his bed. He had accustomed her and trained her for years to accept the fact that both of them were to settle their own problems alone. If that had not been so, and continued to be so, neither of them could have adjusted themselves to the exigencies of life.—“But we have exaggerated this silent agreement to a fatal extreme!” Laudin cried. “What did you think? What did you imagine? How did you finally accommodate yourself to this?”—“I didn’t finally accommodate myself,” she said. “But since we weren’t born as a pair of Siamese twins, I had to reconcile myself to a dividing of ways; and since such a thing as fidelity exists, and has a meaning only so long as the temptations which beset it are ineffectual, I naturally thought that my time was over, and that you were simply too courteous and considerate, and perhaps even a little too cowardly to tell me the truth. And, above all, I had the feeling that somewhere or sometime along your path you had lost me, and had not noticed it, or had noticed it too late, and had utterly forgotten that I was there. But that was a little my fault, too. Because I have always deliberately taken pains to get out of the way and to hide in a corner behind mere things, behind stupid, dumb things, you know, and in the end I could hardly expect you to look for me and find me and drag me out.” She smiled, but her smile was touched with pain. “Above all, I said to myself: there must be no fuss.” She ended with a gesture as though she were spreading a snowy cloth over something that was not quite spotless. “Only no fuss, only no presumptuous self-importance. I know what that is, and how people crowd round you with their empty lamentations.” She was silent and looked at him.

“Well, and now? And to-day?” he asked, in a hushed voice, and stretched out a tentative hand.

She looked at him. He did not dare to repeat the question. She seemed surprised. Perhaps, at this moment, the question seemed to her indelicate, almost an attack that frightened and

confused her. Laudin felt that, felt it remorsefully, as could be seen from his expression. But it could hardly have been this alone which seemed to clear his features of a cloud so that it shone more and more with the radiance of some unseen source of light. While he was tensely watching Pia, the unknown element in her appeared to him with abrupt lucidity. It was not what she had gradually withdrawn from him in the comfortable customs and recurrences of every day; nor was it what she had possessed of youthful sweetness and early delicacy and springtime bloom, and which was now forever gone, so that he would have been but the victim of a sensual illusion had he tried to grasp it, flattered by a fleeting dream; no, it was not that either; it was something different and wholly new, a new form, a new eye, a new face, a new mind, which had grown up without his knowledge or his intervention, and which now came to companion him, between one moment and the next, on the decisive cross-roads between his old life and his new.

Familiar as he was with the infinite number of causes responsible for the decay and ruin of marriage, he had lived too much in the stormy, poisonous atmosphere of catastrophe to give due attention to the more delicate and nobler developments which, raised above even the most cultivated standards of their contemporaries, take place in a few elect souls, gifted by fate with the capacity for transformation. Despite all the ramifications of difficult and often subtle entanglements of a problematic and even tragic character, it was, in the last resort, only the crude, brutal, exalted, untamed, passionate and abnormal that turned the scale, and in most cases provided the initial impulse. Although he may at times have been aware of it, he had not sufficiently cherished nor retained as a guide the perception of what an enormous rôle, in any permanent and really intimate union between a man and a woman, is played by their companionship on the same plane and level of spiritual life. In the beginning they are

sensually and physically near; their mutual surrender is complete and final; but they wander on, believing that they still hold each other, and yet it is long since they have been truly together. A shadow has slipped into the place of the companion. They are living in a dream; they are like people who are not willing, at any price, to give up their illusion or their dream. And no spirit, human or divine, could search and find any guilt in either. But this phenomenon was rare; it was the painful conflict of rare souls. Thus far Laudin's vision had sometimes penetrated. But that the lost and forgotten member of the union, as Pia put it, should choose this shadowy existence only as a disguise, and with a secret shame, a profound feeling of her own worth, should voluntarily withdraw herself in order, in the fullness of time, to return on a higher plane, in a more perfected state, riper for comradeship, sweeter in humanity, nobler in every relation to the world—this was a thing that he had neither known nor experienced nor considered possible. But if this were possible, if such a thing had truly come to pass, then in the face of this, the "phantoms," his phantoms, his "phenomenon," his Errinyes, might melt away; then it was possible to believe (and here his thoughts perhaps halted like birds that have soared beyond their strength)—to believe that this marvellous two-fold being concerning whom he has speculated in so many dreary hours, that this two-fold unity might indeed have become incarnate truth in his own difficult and once so darkened life. . . .

Was it possible to believe that?

"You ask me what is to be done now," he heard Pia say. "I've thought about it. In the last few days I've done little else but think about it. I will tell you what my opinion is. I will answer your questions." And now at last she took the hand which he had stretched out toward her.

He listened as she continued, and what she said had been drawn from the depths of his own thoughts, his own conflicts.

With a kind of intellectual innocence she said bravely and simply the things that he had not dared to admit to himself:

"You must stop living as you have lived hitherto. Your way has not been the right way for you. You will not be an advocate any longer; no more lawsuits, no more consultations with clients, no more pleading in court. You will give up the firm, sell it if you like. You will do what you will. That is necessary above all things. You must abandon this profession. It is not the right one for you. Or, at least, it has not been the right one for you for some time; I do not know exactly for how long. . . ."

"That, my dear Pia, is a bold proposal," he replied, intensely startled, and yet with a secret relief, a secret delight, which did not yet wholly trust the possibility of his liberation. "It is a bold diagnosis and a rash prescription. But can a man simply throw his calling overboard? A calling like that? Is not every true man born to his vocation? And though he may not always feel the continuance of that call, does not life forge its chains about him? It is the lever of existence; it is the motive power. What else in the world am I to do? What else am I good for?"

He mustn't tell her that, Pia continued; he was good for quite other things. She was sure that he had higher qualities in him than those which he utilized in his daily drudgery. She spoke simply and trustfully. He had told her once, years ago, to be sure, that he had failed to find his true life's work and task.—When, he asked in amazement, when had he said that and on what occasion? She couldn't tell him precisely; it was about the time when he had that notorious case in which one child had been substituted for another; surely, he must remember; he had been uncommonly depressed at that time.—Yes, he interrupted her, he did remember. That legal knot had been so hard to undo, and the tangled threads had enmeshed even the judge and the lawyers.—Exactly, she said, and it was then that he had said that he wished it might have

been his mission to lay the foundation for a new code of laws. How well she remembered that! It was never too late to change one's direction for a better one. On that now distant day he had stood before her and had declared that only thus could he serve his country and his people.—“But perhaps it is too late, now,” he objected.—“How can it be too late if you are profoundly determined, and if it is the highest necessity of your nature?”—“So you consider it a necessity, and the highest of all necessities?” he asked, with a singularly watchful air—“I do, indeed.”

“But one is chained by many chains, bound by a thousand duties to such and such professional engagements, to the destinies of other people; my word has been pledged and my personal credit is at stake. . . .” Oh, Pia knew very well what was at stake; more, perhaps, than he was willing to admit. But then the aim was a great one; it was worth fighting for; it must be won. She pressed the fist of her right hand into the palm of her left.—“Must, Pia?”—“Ask yourself whether it is not as I say; be entirely honest with yourself, Friedrich, with yourself and with me.” What a power, as of magic, in her who was always so poor in words!—Yes, he understood it, he realized it. But men would rise up against him and accuse him of disloyalty.—“Let them rise; you must know best.”—“They will say that Laudin was unequal to his tasks, and that he has gone the easiest way, and lives merely to please himself.”—“Those who know you will not say that,” Pia cried, “for they know that, unhappily, your mere pleasure in life is not very great, nor yet your talent for life.” A smile quivered upon Laudin's weary features.—“Whatever we do, the world is careful not to let us withdraw ourselves unstained,” he said, “and you must consider, too, that we live according to a certain standard. There are the children; there is the house. . . .”—“Yes, we now have reached the dangerous point,” Pia replied; “but I will not have you mix up the consideration of mere bread-winning with these other con-

siderations. It goes without saying that the basis of our household must be changed. We must spend less, a great deal less. We must sell or let the house and take a modest flat, or you must send Rely and Marlene to boarding-school, and retire to the country, either alone or with me. Which it shall be we must wait to decide. You must find inner quietude. That is a task, as well as any other. It almost seems to me as though you must go hunting, hunting for yourself, and you must try to catch yourself again, and you will, surely you will."

"Pia!" Laudin cried, shaken to the soul.

"You are not yet forty-eight; you can begin all over again;] you shall and you will. And if you desire to have me as your companion in that task, but in that task alone, then. . . ."

Suddenly, silently, she drooped forward. Her head rested on his bosom.

He laid both hands upon her hair.

64

On one of the last days of the month the anonymous president of the Union of the Flame convoked its members, who had now reached a respectable number, to a special meeting. The appointed place of assembly was the garden of Laudin's villa. This had been Marlene's wish, and since there was no reason why her request should be refused, she had had her way. The day was the last which the family of the former advocate would spend in the beautiful, spacious house; the villa had been let for three years to an American and his wife, who would move in on the morrow.

It was Marlene's secret intention to combine the general celebration with a special one, of which only her most intimate friends were to learn, as it concerned only herself

and those dearest to her. In her own mind she had dedicated this day to the memory of the dead, and she thought thereby to bind the past to the future, to close the door on the one and to begin the other more worthily. In Marlene the sense of periods of life was very strongly developed; this was natural to her years, but it was also the result of a special training, and a special attitude towards the world. It would happen that she would say, smiling: "To-day the alarm-clock went off," by which she did not mean a real clock, but merely that she had inwardly disposed of some matter of importance, and might, as it were, pass through an open door into another chamber of life. If she seemed to live according to programme that did not trouble her, nor did it worry her that others might laugh at her. For her the days were still far apart from one another, the nights were immeasurably long corridors leading from one day to the next, and the year was a delightful infinity.

One of her young friends was a budding sculptor; she gave him a photograph of Nicolas Fraundorfer, and from this portrait the quick and clever worker prepared a terra-cotta bust, a Hermes. When he brought it to her on the afternoon of the festal day both Marlene and Relly were amazed by its resemblance and its truth to life, and Relly, in her impulsive delight, even flung her arms round the sculptor's neck. The bust was set up in the garden; a tall narrow chest served as pedestal, and until their guests arrived the sisters were busied in fixing up small wooden shelves, and decorating the whole structure, according to plan, with flowers in pots and garlands, mostly lilacs and monthly roses, and also a few white and yellow chrysanthemums from the conservatory. The day was cloudless, after a period of rain, and the colours of the flowers were gleaming with unwonted brilliance and purity.

Among the young people who were gathered in the fairly spacious garden it was no secret that the Laudins were on

the point of leaving their luxurious villa and exchanging it for an incomparably simpler dwelling in the city. But not only the fact was known to them; curiously enough, they were pretty exactly informed of the circumstances which had led to such a striking change. Here something imponderable was at work, that mysterious union of suffrages, individually hardly perceptible, but as a whole of irresistible power, which abruptly uplifts a man above his fellows—more especially when he has for a time been misjudged—and suddenly surrounds his name, his achievements and his person, as never before, with a glamour of respect and affection.

So it was that Laudin himself was surprised to find that all eyes were turned upon him, while a profound silence fell upon the assembly, as he came out from the house into the light of the setting sun and descended the wide steps of the terrace, courteous and amiable, holding himself erect, and let his eyes stray over the garden and its green and blooming luxuriance. It surprised him that the various pairs and groups which had been moving about so vivaciously should suddenly stand motionless; he was impressed by the many young faces which were now turned to his; slightly embarrassed, he touched the brim of his hat, and came down the steps. Then Marlene went up to him, smilingly took his hand, and led him to the bust of Nicolas Fraundorfer, now almost buried in flowers.

He stood still, astonished; slowly he raised his hand and bared his head. Marlene looked up at him; her face glowed as she once more took his hand, and her lips quivered. The youths and girls had gathered close about the father and daughter. Pia had appeared on the steps of the terrace, her arm round Relly's shoulders; she looked happy, and not a day more than eighteen, as the enthusiastic Relly never tired of assuring her.

All these young people who surrounded Laudin, silent and full of suppressed eagerness, believed that he was going to

speak to them. But he only broke off a spray of lilac, and said to Marlene: "It is like a springtime of death; yet we will not let ourselves be misled by this word, Marlene, now that you have set me"—and his eyes swept over the circle of attentive faces—"in the midst of so radiant a spring of life."



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